

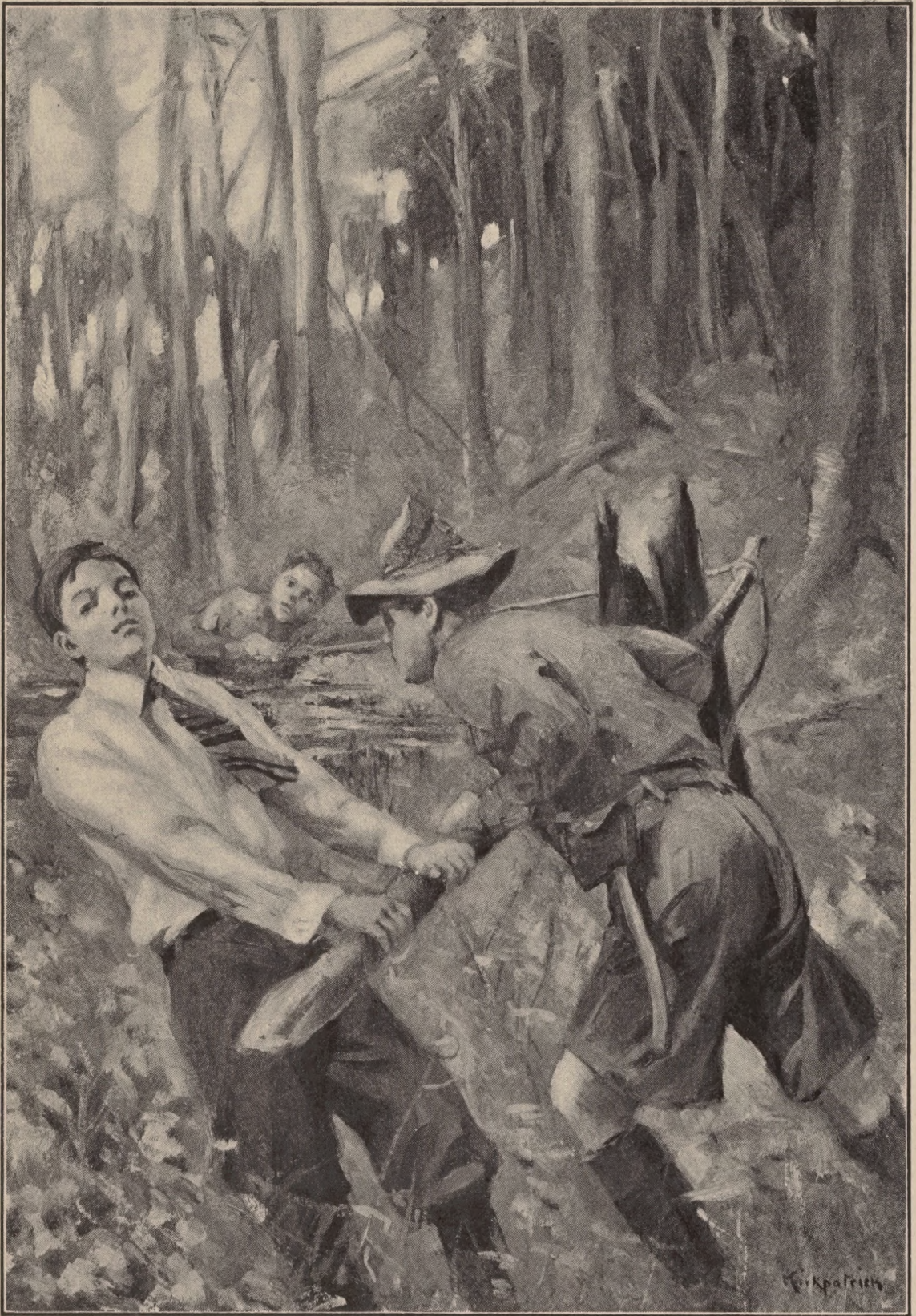
The Boy Scouts of Black Eagle Patrol



Leslie W. Quirk







The hickory bent, the rope tautened and snapped.
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 46.*

THE BOY SCOUTS OF BLACK EAGLE PATROL

BY
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"THE THIRD STRIKE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILLIAM KIRKPATRICK



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BOY SCOUTS OF BLACK EAGLE PATROL

CHAPTER I

HELLO!

“Now!”

With a crash that made every timber in the old barn shiver, “Specs” McGrew landed hard on his heels. It took him a moment to regain his balance; then he looked proudly over his right shoulder at the turning-pole.

“I did it,” he said. He picked up his glasses from the wisp of loose hay where they rested. “You fellows saw me, didn’t you? Come on now, ‘Roundy’; you’re next.”

But Roundy Magoon, after staring first at the bar and then at the other two boys, shook his head and slumped back against the old hay-cutter. “Huh-uh,” he grunted.

“Do you mean you won’t even try?” Specs frowned indignantly. “You know this is the last day. We all said that every fellow in the patrol would have to do it before to-morrow.”

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"Well, it isn't to-morrow yet, is it?" demanded Roundy good-naturedly, as he sought for his fat self a more comfortable hollow on the mound of hay.

"Fifteen minutes from now we'll be on our way to Shadow Island; we won't be back till late to-night. That means, of course, that you won't see this old barn before to-morrow." Specs' voice was severe. "And you and 'Judge' haven't done the trick yet."

Roundy looked about him uneasily. "All right, let Judge do it first," he said, as if that made everything satisfactory.

Leonard Lloyd, assistant patrol leader and by six months the oldest scout in the Black Eagle Patrol, smiled pleasantly at the indolent Magoon. Because of his sense of fairness, he had been nicknamed "Judge."

"Watch me, Roundy," he said, reaching up to grip the bar. "In one minute you're going to be out in the rain alone."

He took a deep breath, and then, with what seemed little more than one move, doubled his legs between his hands, unclasped his fingers, and dropped down, hanging by his knees.

"All right, Judge," advised Specs. "A big swing now, and remember I'm here to turn you right side up, if you need it. When I yell, straighten out."

With a jerk of his body to start the swing, Judge

moved backward and forward unevenly. The beginning cost two or three similar twists and bends, but after that his movement was as steady as a pendulum's. Higher and higher he went, holding fast with his knees, till a final great swing straightened him out, face downward, almost level with the bar.

"Now!" shouted Specs.

At the word, the other boy's knees unkinked suddenly. As he fell, his body revolved to an upright position, so that he landed lightly, with legs flexing to soften the shock.

"How about it?" he smiled, steadying himself with one hand touching the wall.

"Couldn't be better. Come on now, Roundy. You're the last of the eight of us."

Roundy scowled at the bar. "Did 'Buck' do it?"

"Sure, Buck did it. Before he went to Chicago. Didn't he, Judge?"

The other nodded.

"Well, anyhow," Roundy said, sinking back into the hay, "the day isn't over yet, and we haven't started on the hike, and —"

But he never finished the sentence; for four hands caught him, and hauled him, protesting loudly, to the turning-pole.

"This is your barn," pointed out Specs, "or, any-

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how, it's your father's, and it's your turning-pole, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself if you're not willing even to try."

"I'll catch you." Judge held out a strong arm. "Why, you can't hurt yourself if you go head-first."

As he leaped up and caught the bar, Roundy sniffed his scorn. "I'm not afraid of getting hurt, only —"

But he was not allowed to finish this sentence, either; for, seizing his legs, Specs and Judge brought them up between his hands and on over, in such a way that he was presently hanging by his knees.

"We're all waiting for you," said Specs, giving Roundy's plump body an initial tug and push.

Once out swung Roundy, and once back; then, bending at the waist, he caught the bar again with his hands.

"What's the matter? Going to admit you're licked?" asked the scornful Specs.

"Of course not." Roundy was now lowering himself to the floor. "But don't you hear those fellows coming along the cement walk? I'll bet it's Buck back from Chicago."

"That's not Buck," yelled Specs disgustedly. "That's not the way he walks at all. For a scout, Roundy, you're the least observant fellow I ever saw. First, there are two people coming. Second, neither one is Buck. Third, at a guess, I should say one was

surely 'Bi'; his long, muscular stride makes that sound. The other is either 'S. S.' or 'Handy.' "

The door below rattled, the stairs creaked, and in another second five scouts of the Black Eagle Patrol were holding a reunion on the top step.

"Hello, Bi! Hello, Handy! Where's Buck?"

"Haven't seen him." Charley Jones, known otherwise as "Biceps," or "Bi" for short, took a tremendous leap at the turning-pole, swung his legs up, and then, lowering his body till the bar crossed the small of the back, whirled over three times in the "muscle grinder."

"Better jump down, Bi." It was Handy Wallace who spoke, and Handy was squinting at the wall-support of the turning-pole. "The brace there is working loose. Where's a hammer, Roundy?"

"Oh, it's all right," returned Roundy sleepily. "Never mind the hammer. I fixed the brace so it — Give me some of those peanuts before you eat them all."

Specs settled his glasses aggressively on his nose. "This isn't square of Buck," he said. "Buck's our patrol leader, and he promised us he'd be back to-day in time to take that trip to Shadow Island."

"Maybe the Chicago train was late," put in Judge quietly.

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"The 1:45?" Handy queried. "That wasn't late. It came in ahead of time."

"Well," Judge ventured, as the door below opened again, "this may be Buck."

"That's who it is," said Roundy positively; "I heard his footsteps on the walk."

"It isn't," snapped Specs, kicking at the hay-cutter. "I know Buck's walk. There are two fellows again—S. S. and 'Nap.'"

S. S. and Nap it proved to be. Herbert Zane, nicknamed "Spick and Span", came first, his coat off and neatly folded on his arm before he even put foot into the dusty haymow. Emerson Elliot Meeker—"Napoleon"—followed, carrying a pair of small field-glasses.

"There you are!" Specs continued with a disgusted gesture. "It's after three, too. Fine example for a patrol leader—that's all I've got to say."

Once more Judge raised an objection.

"We all know that the Sawyers intended coming to-day, but they might have missed the train."

"They came all right." S. S. was very positive. "We were on Burden's Hill trying out Nap's field-glasses, and we saw smoke coming out of the Sawyers' chimney, and the shutters were open."

"And Buck's little sister was playing in the yard,"

finished Nap. "Oh, Buck's folks are here all right."

Just then Specs' quick ears signaled a fresh arrival. "Sh-h-h!" he whispered. "This must be Buck now."

"Might be Mr. Stanton," ventured Bi, dropping noiselessly from his perch on the bar.

Specs shook his head scornfully at the mere idea that it might be the new scout master. "I know Mr. Stanton's step. And Mr. Stanton wouldn't stop at the door that way. It's Buck, I tell you. We're all here, so it couldn't be anybody else." Specs was speaking under his breath. "He thinks he's going to steal up and surprise us. Well, we'll surprise him."

The door below had opened. The newcomer was walking softly to the stairway. Specs scooped up a big horse-blanket from the floor.

"Come on, fellows, catch hold of this." He jerked it open. "We will go fishing."

There was an answering chuckle as the seven boys, grasping the great woollen spread, crouched behind the high partition that hid completely one side of the stairway.

"Ready!" warned Specs. "When he comes — pounce!"

The lowest step creaked as the unseen visitor began to ascend. The Black Eagle Patrol smiled broadly. Buck Sawyer was not only patrol leader, but

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he was also the best liked of them all; and it seemed only fitting, after his two months of absence, to give him some sort of an out-of-the-way welcome.

Softly and more softly the steps came, as if the boy on the stairs were either a little uncertain of his greeting, or else planning a pounce himself. Then, when the seven Black Eagles had just come to the conclusion that they could not (without bursting) hold their breaths a second longer, a hand reached past the edge of the high wooden screen.

Bi, the nearest, grabbed it, and with a yell jerked the hand and its accompanying body out into the dim-lighted room. With an echoing yell, the remaining six swamped the entrant in the folds of the big horse-blanket.

It was an exciting five seconds; for not only did the prey object to being caught and cooped, but he was assisted in his objecting by Biceps, who for some reason was elbowing and shouldering the other six from the blanket-entangled bundle.

“Get off!” he shouted. “Take that blanket away! Leave him alone, I tell you! It —”

“Why, Buck knows we’re just joking, don’t you, Buck?” panted Specs impatiently, as he received a shove in the ribs.

But Bi said nothing. Instead, he lifted the blanket

from the boy on the floor, who had now stopped struggling and lay quiet.

Little Nap Meeker peered down at him, swallowed hard, and spoke.

“I’ll be Waterlooed!” he said in an awed voice.

Specs looked next. He said nothing, but it was plain that he was thinking hard. Then they all began to understand what had happened.

For on the floor, instead of Buck Sawyer, with his broad shoulders and his rosy face, lay quite another boy. He was small and slight, with pale cheeks, blue eyes, and sandy hair. In age he was not over twelve or thirteen. Just now he looked distressingly weak and fragile, as if the rough handling had been too much for him.

He stared up at the faces that were bending over him, rubbed gingerly the back of his head, smiled with a distinct effort, and said:

“Hello!”

CHAPTER II

HEAD FIRST

For a second or more after the boy spoke, there followed a stunned silence. Then the apologies began.

"You — you'll have to ex —" sputtered S. S.

"We beg your par —" interrupted Judge.

"We thought it was Buck," explained Specs. "We thought it was a friend of ours."

"That's why we were so rough," Nap pointed out solemnly.

"You're not really hurt, are you?" asked Roundy.

"Give him some of your peanuts, Handy."

Bi and Roundy helped the late "fish" to his feet, and S. S. recovered his cap from a fold of the blanket. The boy felt the back of his head again, settled his cap, and faced Judge. Somehow or other, strangers always picked out Judge as the one to whom explanations should be made.

"I came to tell you about Buck," began the new boy.

"You're the Black Eagle Patrol, aren't you? Well,

I'm Buck's cousin, George Payton, and I've come here to Lakeville to live with my uncle — Buck's father, I mean."

"What about Buck?" demanded Specs. He spoke with gruff sternness, quite as if little George were somehow concealing Buck up **his** sleeve.

"He's in Chicago." The boy seemed embarrassed. "Yes, Buck's in Chicago — and he's not coming back!"

For a moment the Black Eagle Patrol stood in astonished silence; then they fired a volley of questions. "Why not?" "What's the matter?" "Is Buck sick?" "Why didn't he tell us?" "Isn't he coming back at all?" "Why?" "Why?" "Why?"

The boy spread his feet slightly, as if to brace himself from the onslaught. "Buck didn't know himself till last night. Then my uncle, Buck's father, decided that he ought to go to boarding-school this year. So he entered Buck in a military academy near Chicago, and — and Buck isn't coming back," he finished.

The Black Eagle Patrol said nothing. They merely looked at little George Payton and thought, and the things they thought were not at all complimentary to that small chap.

Here was Buck — or, rather, here wasn't Buck — big and strong and happy and the best friend a fellow

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could want to have; and in place of Buck stood this little, pale-faced youngster, about as big as a minute and looking like a match. And a split match at that! It was too much!

Without a word, Judge Lloyd turned and stalked down the stairway, followed in melancholy silence by S. S. and Handy. After them trailed Bi and Roundy and Nap. As they grouped in the yard, sprawling over the thick grass near the pump, Judge voiced the feelings of the crowd.

“I feel”—he paused—“I feel rotten.”

“We all feel rotten,” agreed Bi.

“It’s bad enough that Buck is gone,” Judge continued. “I feel rotten about that. But there’s another matter. You all know we should have eight fellows in our patrol, and here we are with only seven. And you all know, too, that there’s nobody else in Lakeville who’d fit.”

“How about Ernie Langer?” suggested Nap.

Judge shook his head. “Earnie thinks the Boy Scouts are a joke, and so does Billy Reynolds. Sanford Anvers—well, there’s no use even considering him.”

Good-natured Roundy ventured a suggestion. “How about this new kid—George, or whatever his name is?”

Six Boy Scouts raised their voices in a protesting chorus.

"You don't suppose he could fill Buck's boots, do you?" demanded S. S. sarcastically.

"No-o; he'd have to begin at the bottom, of course. But we might get acquainted with him and see what sort he is."

Judge looked toward the barn, out of which Specs was just hurrying, his face one wide grin.

"Where is the new fellow, Specs?"

As he dropped on the grass, Specs chuckled uproariously.

"You know that trap-door that leads down into the hayrack above the manger?"

The others nodded. Roundy's father had given up his horse for a gasoline runabout, but the stall and manger remained unchanged. The hayrack was a wooden-bound chute, from which old Blacky had pulled his daily rations. Specs rolled over on the ground, laughing, as he pictured it now.

"Well, I wanted to see if the little rabbit knew enough to keep his head warm, so I pulled open the trap-door and told him to climb down if he wanted to see something. And"—here Specs had to pause until he had his laugh out—"and then I closed the door and piled the hay-cutter on top of it. So he's down there

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in the rack like a monkey in a cage. Isn't it great?"

Specs was rolling over again in his merriment when a strong hand jerked his collar. It was Judge's.

"Look here, Specs. You know that's not the sort of thing for a Boy Scout to do."

"I couldn't help it." Specs was still laughing. "And I didn't lie to him. He can see something down there; he can look through the bars and see the sides of the stall."

"It's not the square thing. You had no business doing it. It will take more than one 'good turn' to offset that, Specs." The usually placid Judge was angry as he jumped to his feet.

"Well," Specs seemed a little shamefaced, "we have a right to protect ourselves, haven't we? We don't want the little rabbit tagging around after us just because he's Buck's cousin. And, besides, I wanted to see if he was any good—and he isn't! After he found he was down there, like a rabbit in a cage, he didn't do a thing. Didn't even say a word."

"What does that prove?" asked Judge, starting toward the barn, followed by the others in the patrol.

"Well, it proves—it proves he's no good," explained Specs tamely. "It proves he hasn't any nerve

or any get-up-and-go about him. When we find him, he'll probably be bawling his head off, and when we turn him loose, he'll go straight home. We won't be bothered with him any more."

But George Payton was not "bawling his head off" in the hayrack prison. The boys found him rather uncomfortably cramped and looking not unlike a monkey in a cage, but when he was helped through the trap to the hay floor, and the others stood back to survey him, there were no tear tracks on his cheeks, nor were his eyes red. He not only seemed calm and quite at ease, but he smiled a little as they stared.

" 'A scout is cheerful,' " Judge quoted softly to Specs. " 'He smiles whenever he can.' I don't know that he's so hopeless. And now," he raised his voice, "if you don't apologize, I will."

"I — I apologize," stammered Specs.

Then, without waiting for a reply, he jerked off his glasses, jumped for the bar, and, hanging by his knees, swung violently back and forth, finally straightening his legs and landing triumphantly upon his feet.

As he settled his glasses once more upon the bridge of his nose, he turned to George Payton, who stood a little apart from the others near the stairway.

"Maybe," said Specs, "maybe I was wrong in treating you the way I did." (His voice showed that he

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believed he was altogether right.) “Maybe I was wrong. If I was, I’ve apologized. And now”—he paused solemnly —“if you’ll just try to do what I did, I’ll apologize again.”

The others stared at Buck’s cousin. He had not made a favorable impression, but here was a chance to prove himself. The boy looked first at the pole and then at the floor. It seemed to the Black Eagle Patrol that he grew a shade paler. Certainly, some inner struggle was holding him.

“No,” he said finally, “I—I don’t think I care to try.”

Specs turned to Judge with an expression that said, as plainly as print: “Didn’t I tell you the little rabbit wouldn’t do?” The others in the patrol edged back a little from the new boy, as if they, too, felt that George Payton was an outsider who had once and for all lost any chance of ever becoming an insider.

Luckily, the unpleasant silence which followed lasted no longer than it would take to count five.

“Boys!” The crowd turned suddenly to see Mr. Stanton, the scout master, at the head of the stairs. Specs’ performance had caused the man’s coming to pass unobserved. “Boys, there’s some bad news for all of us.”

“About Buck?” asked Judge.

Mr. Stanton nodded.

“We’ve heard it already. Buck’s cousin —”

At this, George Payton stepped into the group.

“If you’re Mr. Stanton, the scout master,” he said, “Buck has told me about you. He wanted me to say to you that he wouldn’t be back this year, and that he thought it would be best to move each fellow up one number: make Judge Lloyd patrol leader; and three, two; and so on, down to seven. Then —” He stopped suddenly, reddening.

“Then —” prompted Mr. Stanton.

The new boy threw back his head; he thrust out his chin. “Buck told me,” he announced defiantly, “that there wasn’t another fellow in town who wanted to join the Boy Scouts now, and he said — he said I might be trained to join the Black Eagle Patrol.”

“Why, yes,” agreed Mr. Stanton easily. “Yes, indeed, we’ll consider the matter at our next meeting. We —”

“Do you know the tenth scout law?” Specs demanded of the new boy.

“Well, what if I do?”

“‘A scout,’” quoted Specs maliciously, looking at the turning-pole, “‘is brave.’”

George Payton’s teeth came together with a click. He turned to the scout master.

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"I wish, sir," he said respectfully, "that you would stand near this bar while I try something."

In wondering silence the patrol watched the small boy toss off his coat, breathe deeply twice, and spring lightly up to catch the bar.

"He's got nerve, all right," whispered Handy to S. S.

The new boy's face was white; he looked timid, almost frightened. Slowly he drew up his legs; then he swung down, his hands dangling below his head and his knees gripping the pole.

"Got some muscle," muttered Bi as, with a vigorous contraction of the body, George began to swing.

"All right," encouraged the scout master cheerfully; "I know what you're trying to do. You can make it, too, but if you don't, I'm here to catch you. Straighten out when you're ready to let go."

The boy on the bar was swinging desperately, now with his face to the barn floor, now with his back.

"He's no coward," said Roundy softly to Judge.

The latter offered no comment. He was studying the frightened, grim expression upon young Payton's face, and he was wondering.

Then, without warning, came a grinding, grating, ripping sound, as if the barn were being wrenched apart. Handy had been right; the brace had weakened

under the strain. With a final crash, the support of one end of the turning-pole tore loose.

Head first, back down, the boy shot blindly to the floor.

CHAPTER III

THE TENTH LAW

S. S. shut his eyes. Specs and Judge lunged blunderingly forward, but the scout master was ahead of them.

Barely in time he was, too. Only an instant before the plunging body reached the boards, he managed to thrust an arm under it, between the shoulders and the hips. Down hard, dividing the shock between his heels and his hands, the boy fell. But back and head were safe.

A moment later, as young Payton stood brushing himself off, Specs noticed that the boy's legs were trembling.

"Are you scared?" asked Specs, with a shade of scorn in his voice.

The new boy faced him defiantly. "Yes," he said, "I'm good and scared. But somebody's got to fix that pole, because I'm going to try it again."

"Don't you think," suggested Mr. Stanton, "that perhaps you had better put off another trial till tomorrow?"

Young Payton turned a white face to him. "I want to do it now," he said, "while I'm scared."

Handy had already brought the hammer from downstairs, and with long tenpenny nails was clinching the braces so securely that Goliath himself could have done the "giant swing" on the bar without budging it an inch. Handy had a habit of doing things with tools in a most efficient manner.

"Are you sure you want to try it now?" asked the scout master, placing a friendly hand on the new boy's shoulder.

"I'm sure — right now."

"And I think you're right," said Mr. Stanton heartily. "This time, too, you're going to do it."

Nodding grimly, George Payton jumped for the pole. Less than a half-minute later he was standing securely on his feet, having swung cleanly off and made his half-turn through the air without assistance.

The members of the Black Eagle Patrol were cheering in spite of themselves, but young Payton did not stop for a single handshake. He picked up his cap, walked to the stairway, and faced about.

"Well, I did it," he said bitterly. "But if it's any consolation to you fellows, and particularly to you" — he pointed a finger at the embarrassed Specs — "if it's

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any consolation, I say, I'll tell you that I was scared — scared green — this last time, just as I was the first. And if I had to do it again, I'd be just as scared. That's all."

Then he tramped down the steps with a lot of unnecessary noise, and thump-thumped his way out upon the cement walk.

Specs spoke first.

"We don't want him," he declared. "He hasn't the right spirit. He's a coward by his own confession, and he couldn't live up to our tenth law. He's a — a sniveling rabbit. Why, when he was in that hay-rack, he didn't say a word; he didn't even try to get out again."

"He didn't, eh?" commented Handy, who was examining, through the open trap, the bars of the hay-rack. "Just let me tell you that if we hadn't come when we did, he'd have been out and free."

There was a rush for the wooden cage.

"See! He must have had one of those tool-bladed knives. Look here! He'd pulled two nails from the top of the second bar, and he was working on the third."

"That's right," admitted Specs reluctantly, as he knelt down to examine the evidence. "The little rabbit was gnawing his way out; scared to stay there, I

guess. Anyhow, we don't want him in the patrol. Why, his influence would —"

He halted his speech with open mouth. There had come a prodigious boom; the floor had shaken suddenly with a force that suggested a stick of dynamite. Specs whirled to see Roundy smiling beneath the turning-pole.

"I did it," bragged that plump youth. "I was scared, but I wasn't going to let any little rabbit stump me. Didn't I make a nice turn, Judge?"

Judge nodded. He was thinking, not of Roundy's achievement, but of young Payton, who had been its inspiration. He was wondering —

"And now," announced Mr. Stanton briskly, "if we are to have our supper on Shadow Island, as we planned, we'd better be moving. I'm sorry the patrol won't be eight strong, as it would have been with Buck, but unless —"

"Unless what?" asked Judge quickly.

"Unless you fellows care to consider the — the little rabbit as a possible recruit, and ask him to go along with us, you'll have to chant, 'We are seven.' What do you think, Judge?"

"He's a coward," put in Specs.

Judge's mild reproof was almost a concession. He wanted to have a long talk with young Payton before

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he reached any decision himself; he wanted to watch the boy face some crucial situation. Most assuredly, the Black Eagle Patrol must not harbor a coward, but there could be no harm in inviting him to the picnic supper on Shadow Island.

“I’ll look him up,” promised Judge. “If he wants to come, I’ll bring him over in the launch. Time to be moving, fellows.

The outing on Shadow Island had been planned to welcome home Buck Sawyer, the leader of the patrol. Handy’s uncle had loaned his launch, capable of carrying comfortably the whole nine of them (counting Mr. Stanton), but the scout master had already accepted Bi’s invitation to paddle over to the Island in his canoe with him. This left but six for the launch, unless the new boy chose to accompany them.

And he did. The others had been waiting but a few minutes when Judge brought him down to the pier. He was silent now to the point of shyness, but he had been talking to Judge.

“I guess,” he had told him, “I must be a coward at heart. What I did on the turning-pole wasn’t anything brave. I did it because I was afraid of what you fellows would think of me if I didn’t do it. You see, I was scared to flunk that way in front of you fellows — particularly the one you call Specs. I’d like to join

the Black Eagle Patrol as a tenderfoot, but if I'm a coward I know you don't want me."

Judge had smiled back at him. The confession warmed his heart toward the boy. He had known these things were true while he watched back in the barn; and he had a notion that it took courage to tell them, as young Payton had told them to him. But he was too much boy himself to say so in words. He had merely coughed a little, and looked away, and remarked carelessly: "Oh, I guess you'd have nerve enough in a pinch."

Down in the cockpit, just behind the cabin, Handy was tinkering away at the engine with a huge monkey-wrench. Presently he lifted a flushed, perspiring face.

"Ready!" he announced, looking about to see if all the fellows were aboard. Assured of this, he whirled the fly-wheel, the engine spat a puff of dirty white smoke from its exhaust pipe and settled down to a rhythmical whirr that sent the boat forward at a good clip through the clear blue water of the lake. It was a boiling hot day, with just enough breeze to ruffle the surface, and before they were anywhere near the jut of land toward which Handy was steering, the boys were peeled down to their bathing suits, ready to drop overboard. Payton stripped with the rest of

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them, looking ridiculously tiny and babyish in his skin-tight suit.

After a bit, the engine began to miss and back-fire. Handy tightened and loosened nuts and bolts, and adjusted his mixture, and tested his batteries, and did all the other things you do when a motor goes balky, but in spite of his skill it stopped altogether. The launch was about a half-mile offshore by this time, with not enough wind to make it worth while dropping the hook.

It was young Payton who discovered the hole in the lake bottom. The water was very shoal where they floated, and as clear as a crystal. He could see the bottom distinctly, with the pebbles and weeds and shells lying under several feet of water, quite as if they were displayed in some show case. But there was one black, blurred spot.

"Isn't that a hole in the lake bottom?" he asked Judge. "It looks almost like the mouth of a little cave."

The others rushed to his side, making the launch list sharply, and arousing protests from Handy, who was sweating over the engine. The hole appeared to be about four feet in diameter, with its sides of solid rock. Judge dropped Handy's lead, but could not determine the depth because of a slant the hole took after

going down a few feet deeper than the bottom of the lake about it.

“Whew!” exclaimed Specs. “Wonder what’s in that hole, anyhow?” He looked at Payton. “Dare you to dive into it, Georgie.”

The new boy shook his head, smiling a little uncertainly.

“What you ’fraid of? I double-dare you.”

Again Payton shook his head. He had stopped smiling now.

“I — I’m not afraid to do it,” he said stoutly, “but I don’t see any sense in it.”

A little snicker grew and drifted about the fellows, like the sneer of a summer wind, and then died out again.

“How about doing it yourself, Specs?” asked Roundy Magoon good-naturedly. “I dare you to do it.”

For answer, Specs removed his glasses and climbed to the deck of the tiny cabin, which brought him to a position about six feet above the surface of the water. With a careful, measuring eye, he studied the outlet of the hole, slowly raising his hands above his head.

Judge was standing next to little Payton, in the cockpit, and saw him tremble.

“I don’t think there is any real danger,” he said

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thoughtfully. "Specs is a clever diver. Why, it's nothing!"

"Isn't it?" asked Payton with a sudden burst of emotion. "Don't you see that the hole isn't over four feet wide at its mouth, and that it has been worn out of solid rock? Suppose he misjudges it a little and hits the edge? Or suppose he takes it clean — it's like crawling head first into a narrow cave in the dark and not knowing what's at the other end. I —"

"Well?" Judge was looking hard at him.

"I wouldn't do it for a million dollars," admitted little Payton frankly; and, although he did not realize it at the moment, that confession stamped him a coward among others. None of them stopped to reason that recklessness is not courage. "Please don't, Specs!"

But Specs was not to be stopped. He was fond of the limelight — and he had been dared. He lowered his arms and smiled genially. This was his moment; he had shown up the new boy in his true colors.

"Why not?" he demanded. "I'll probably do a lot of things you won't dare to do — kid! Well, here goes."

With hands in front of him, ready to raise as he hit the surface, and with his body poised perfectly for the dive, he launched himself into the water. Payton and

the other five leaned over the gunwale of the boat, holding their breaths and straining their eyes to catch the last glimpse of him.

Specs dived for the center of the hole, taking it as if it were a bull's-eye. Through the crystal-clear water, the others watched his legs moving a little, frog-fashion, to add to the force of his dive. Then, with a final fillip of his white toes, he disappeared into the ugly black shadows of the hole.

Little Payton sucked in his breath as the other dived. He found himself wishing he had pointed out the dangers more eloquently to the assistant patrol leader. The others seemed to have something of the same feeling now, because after Specs was out of sight, they stood about nervously, saying nothing and looking a good deal more solemn than boys usually do. Judge paced back and forth in the cramped quarters of the cockpit. Handy went back to tinkering with his engine, but his eyes were on the surface of the water.

"He probably won't stay under long," hazarded Payton uneasily; "at least, not this first time."

He spoke simply because he was too nervous to keep silent. The remark wasn't tactful, but it was the first thing that came into his head, and he blurted it out without stopping to think how it might aggravate the suspense.

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It sounded reasonable, though; it was reasonable. Whatever Specs discovered in the hole could await his second trip of investigation. But he did not come to the surface at once.

He had been under water five or ten seconds already. Payton counted another ten to himself, hurrying the last two or three a little in his fear. From the lockers, where they had thrown their outer clothes, he could hear a dollar watch ticking loudly. Judge had stopped pacing now, and was standing near the new boy, shuffling his feet.

It was nearly a half-minute since Specs had dived. There was something peculiar, something unusual, something threatening about his staying under so long. Where he had slipped through the water above the hole, there was not a sign to mark his path.

A hand gripped Payton's arm. A shaking finger pointed downward. With a dread of what he might see, the boy stared back toward the hole. The water was not still and undisturbed now. Coming up from somewhere below were scores and scores of little bubbles.

"He's letting — letting out his breath," came Judge's frightened voice.

Payton knew well enough what that meant. When your lungs are bursting under water, and you are

tempted to allow your breath to escape, you don't stop to think what will happen if you do. They'll hurt just as much for lack of air, as they will for being expanded too long; and when you breathe in again, you'll fill them with water.

They could see the precious air from Specs' lungs bubbling to the surface. In a few seconds more, the diver would be sucking in water to take its place. Unless something were done —

Judge Lloyd looked at the gaping hole beneath the water and shuddered. He was not a good diver, by any means, and it seemed to him that if he had been the best in the world, he couldn't have forced himself to go to the rescue. It meant diving into a dark, dangerous, narrow, rock-walled hole far below the surface.

The patrol leader looked at the others: at Roundy Magoon's awkward figure; at S. S.'s horrified face; at Handy Wallace, sitting weakly on the grates beside the engine; at Nap Meeker, looking as Napoleon must have looked the day of his defeat. None of them was more than a fair diver or swimmer. Perhaps the new boy — Then Judge laughed a little hysterically. Payton do it? Payton, the coward, who had expressed his horror of the hole even before Specs dived! No, he must do it himself.

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Somebody climbed to the cabin deck. It was the new boy, Payton, and no other. As he poised for the plunge, Judge reached out begging hands, staring at him with fascinated eyes. Payton's face was white, but there was determination in his resolute eyes and in his hard-pressed lips. His little body was stiffened like a puppet's. But Judge knew instinctively that there was no danger of his faltering at the last moment.

He dived. To the patrol leader's infinite relief, he cut the water with the clean sharpness betokening the accomplished diver and "took" the hole as cleanly as Specs had, almost a minute before. The ripples clouded Judge's view of what lay below, and he could not even tell whether the bubbles were still oozing to the surface. He was a little glad of the doubt. All of them were.

There followed another awful wait. It may have lasted only a few seconds, but it seemed like hours. And then — then the tiny Payton came bobbing to the surface, working his left arm vigorously and bearing Specs McGrew in his other.

The boys in the boat all talked at once. They jostled each other to reach out for the two fellows in the water and drag them into the launch. They wanted to be doing something after the terrible strain. If

one of them had started a song, they would have shouted it forth at the top of their voices. The reaction from the tense wait had them in its grip.

Little Payton stood up and looked at Specs, who lay still and limp on the grates of the cockpit.

"Is — is he dead?" he asked weakly.

Then the others jumped to their work, as do Boy Scouts who are prepared, while Payton watched them with undisguised admiration. They turned poor Specs over, face downward, arms extended above his head. Judge knelt astride the body, fitting his hands into the spaces between the short ribs. Handy reached into the locker for the loud-ticking dollar watch. Then, alternately, as Handy said "Now!" Judge lifted gently, allowing the weight of the upper body to fall upon his hands, only to relax the pressure at the next "Now!" and repeating this movement every four or five seconds. This tended to effect a change of air and to induce artificial breathing.

Presently, as Payton stood watching, a little frightened and doubtful as to whether they were doing it right, Specs' lips quivered, and he began to breathe. Instantly the others sprang to his side and started rubbing his legs and body toward the heart, thus promoting circulation. And, after a bit, Specs sat up, still weak and confused, but very much alive.

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When he had fully revived, he told them what had happened. He had dived into the hole like a rock, going deeper and deeper until he came to the curve or turn. Foolishly — this was his own word — foolishly pushing forward, he had wedged himself in the narrowing hole. With shoulders caught fast, and without space to turn around, he had no recourse other than to kick and push his body forward. Eventually, of course, he had lost consciousness.

Little Payton wouldn't talk about the rescue at all. "It was easy enough," he said awkwardly; and probably it was, once he had dived. But they all knew it had taken true courage to plunge into that yawning hole.

"Fellows," said Judge presently, "I don't want to hear any more dares among the members of my patrol, tempting somebody to do foolish, reckless stunts. I'll just put one final dare up to you, and then we won't mention the word again. I dare you to show me, anywhere on this lake, a nervier chap or a better diver than little Payton here."

Nobody accepted the dare. It looked for a moment as if Specs were about to protest, but when he spoke it was to the new boy.

"Payton," he said, "do you want to be a tenderfoot of the Black Eagle Patrol, a Boy Scout?"

“Yes!” exploded that youngster eagerly.

“Good!” snapped Specs. “I’ll vote for you.” Then he turned manfully to the others. “Fellows,” he said, “I want to tell you that I was mistaken about — about this little rabbit. I think we want him in the patrol; anyhow, I do. And we’ll give him a nickname right now. He’s ‘Bunny.’”

And Bunny grinned happily. He was one of them now; he was no longer a despised outsider. In due course of time, probably, he would be number 8 of the Black Eagle Patrol.

CHAPTER IV

ON SHADOW ISLAND

For a time, while Handy tinkered with the balky motor, the prospects of getting to Shadow Island that afternoon were none too bright. It was S. S. who first put the thought into words.

Handy looked up. "She'll go," he announced doggedly. "If you get a hot enough spark, and a proper mixture, and don't waste the force of your explosions, any gas engine will go."

Judge smiled. "You'll like Handy," he whispered to the new boy. "He hasn't much imagination, but he's great at building things, and plugging along at jobs till he gets them done to his own satisfaction. You can't beat him at anything in which tools figure. He'll have that engine going in a minute — sure!"

As if to prove the truth of this statement, the motor coughed suddenly, spat smoke and oil and smell once or twice, and then settled down to purring, rhythmical activity. Handy lifted his hot face to catch the breeze, but there was no triumph in his expression.

From the very first, he had known the engine would go sooner or later.

Ten minutes later, the launch pushed her nose upon the sandy beach of Shadow Island, and the seven boys piled out. Judge halted for a final command.

"Make her fast, Roundy," he ordered, pointing to the launch. "Come on, you other fellows. Mr. Stanton and Bi are already here."

Bunny wondered how he knew. There was no canoe visible, and he had seen no tracks upon the sand. He puzzled over the matter as he trailed the others, who followed the beach for fifty feet or more before turning into a path that led upward and away from the shore. The island, over a mile in length and very hilly, appeared to be densely wooded at this end. The shade of the trees was grateful to Bunny after the glare of the lake, and he sniffed hungrily the clean, pungent — Why, it was smoke he smelled! And he smiled all at once: he had learned how Judge knew of the presence of Mr. Stanton and Bi.

They came upon these two presently. The scout master listened gravely to the tale of the rescue out in the lake, said a word or two of warning to Specs about mistaking recklessness for courage, and smiled at Bunny in a way that warmed the cockles of that boy's heart.

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Bi was dangling a curious bow and arrow arrangement in his hands and gazing proudly upon a tiny bonfire that crackled and snapped at his feet.

“Lighted it by rubbing sticks,” he announced.

For five or ten minutes he explained and demonstrated. To Bunny, who had never even heard of such mysteries, it was like a glimpse of another world. The bow was of hickory, its thong of leather. If you were lost in the woods without a match, Bi pointed out, you could easily find your hickory bow, and you could use a leather shoe-string, or a part of a belt, for the thong. Now, by wrapping this latter about a many-sided stick of fir, and pulling it backward and forward, the stick would revolve rapidly; and by making it drill into a shallow hole or pit in a block of fir wood, known as a fire-board, it would produce a fine sawdust, brown at first, then black, then smoking. When it gave off a cloud of smoke, it was to be fanned gently, until a glowing coal was visible, which could be used to ignite some cedar tinder.

After they had all experimented, with varying degrees of success, and Bunny had resolved to rig up his own fire-sticks and practice till he could do it, Scout Master Stanton looked up suddenly.

“Time to get our fireplace built,” he said briskly. “All of us — Hello, where’s Roundy?”

Nobody knew. Judge explained that he had asked him to make fast the launch, and suggested that perhaps the boy had lost himself later in following them. Mr. Stanton nodded solemnly, but Bunny detected several smiles among the scouts and shrewdly concluded that Roundy might turn up after the work was done.

"We'll make it a variation of the man-hunt game, then," the scout master said. "I'll send you out in pairs to bring him in. To discover him, you'll have to put yourself in his place as he left the launch and imagine exactly what he would do. It will be more a test of ingenuity and imagination than woodcraft, I fancy. Let's see: Judge and Bi may go together, and Nap and S. S., and Handy and — and Bunny here. I think Specs has had enough adventuring for one day and had better stay with me."

Bunny looked at Handy and smiled. Handy looked at Bunny and smiled. Bunny thought: "Here I am paired off with the scout who has the least imagination of anybody in the patrol; but I want to know him, even if we don't bring Roundy in." Handy thought: "Here I am paired off with this new kid, who hasn't any more notion about a man-hunt game than I have about the language of fishes; but I want to know him, even if we don't bring Roundy in."

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Then they wandered off together, still smiling, and saying nothing at all to each other, as strange boys usually neglect to do, until, quite by the merest chance, they spied a cloth object in their path.

The object was a cap. Handy pounced upon it like a hawk, twirled it about in his hands once or twice, and whistled softly.

"It's Roundy's, all right," he said positively, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and looking about him, as if he expected to see the plump boy half-concealed in the bushes. "What do you make of it?"

"Well," said Bunny slowly, "a fellow isn't apt to lose his cap when he's just strolling around, is he? Chances are, he was hustling for some reason. But even so, a cap's a hard thing to juggle off. Suppose — just suppose — he was chasing some animal —"

"Yes," urged Handy, wide-eyed; "maybe a rabbit or a badger. Go on."

"And suppose, after it reached this point in the path, it disappeared before Roundy came around that bend. He swerved suddenly to one side."

"I know which side he would choose," said the practical Handy. "He'd go to the left, because it slants down hill; the other way, he'd have to climb. I know Roundy."

"I don't see how he happened to lose his cap,

though," confessed Bunny, "even if he did go into the trees here. I don't — Yes, I do! I've got it now. A low branch — see, here's one about five feet high — swept it off his head and shot it back to the path. Come on, Handy; we're on his trail."

They pushed through the undergrowth to an open space beyond. It was slow work, and it left them winded.

"By the time Roundy reached this edge of the woods," Bunny guessed, "he was hot and cross and — and thirsty. Is there a well or a spring near here?"

"Used to be a sort of a spring, but nobody uses it since they fixed up that other one back where we landed. Shall I hunt for the old one?"

"Yes, if it isn't too much bother."

"Bother nothing!" snorted Handy. "I like this game of putting yourself in the other fellow's place. I wish I had brains enough to help. If you were twins, you'd be the pair to bring Roundy in. I don't help a bit."

But he plodded ahead resolutely, just the same, twisting in and out among trees, and up and over rocks, all the time descending the slope toward the lake. It seemed impossible that Roundy could be there still, even if he had halted for a drink of water,

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but there might be some clue as to the direction he had taken.

Ahead of him, Handy came to an abrupt stop, holding up a warning hand. Even as the last twig under his foot snapped back into place, Bunny heard a faint cry.

"Help!" came the call. "Help!"

Handy turned a startled face. "That's Roundy's voice," he said. "Something's wrong. Come on!"

They broke into a desperate sprint, running along side by side, for Bunny was no longer dependent upon his companion for guidance. Closer and closer sounded the appeals for help, until, finally, after a run of two or three hundred yards, the boys came within sight of Roundy Magoon — or, rather, within sight of Roundy Magoon's head and shoulders and arms.

The balance of him was buried in what looked like a quagmire of mud. Above him on the hillside a tiny spring gurgled, feeding a rivulet that oozed close to his extended arms; on either side, apparently, was firm land. But for a space of perhaps ten feet about him was a sea of slimy bog.

"Help!" he shrieked at them. "Help! I'm sinking!"

Handy acted promptly. While Bunny stood helpless, the other found a dead sapling long enough to

reach the luckless Roundy. Once that youth had clutched it firmly, Bunny and Handy pulled hard. There was no response, no "give" at all.

"Shall I get the other fellows?" asked Bunny nervously. "He may go down deeper — over his head!"

"Look here, Roundy," called Handy; "what are you standing on?"

"I don't know," wailed the unfortunate. "I — I don't think I'm standing on anything; I'm sinking."

"No, you're not," denied Handy. "I've been watching you, and you haven't slipped an inch. Either you're on a sunken log, or you've gone down to firm ground or rock. Besides, everybody but Mr. Stanton and Specs is out hunting for you." He turned to Bunny. "No, we found him; we'll take him back ourselves, without help. That's the test of this man-hunt game we're playing to-day, you know — to bring him in."

"You have to get me out first," reminded Roundy in an agonized voice.

"Can we do it?" Bunny asked.

"Easy as falling off a log. First, we'll need a rope. You can spot the launch again, can't you? She lies right along the shore here, about half a mile away. Well, you get the anchor line and trot back with it.

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If you see any of the other fellows, tell them to keep off and play the game fair —”

“Look here,” roared Roundy, “I’m not playing any game. I want to get out.”

“You will,” soothed Handy.

“But I want to get out now. You two — two kids aren’t strong enough to pull out a fly. What good’ll a rope do you? Get a horse. Get a team. Do something, won’t you?”

“Better run along, Bunny,” advised Handy. “The hippo. is getting peevish.”

As he turned away, Bunny saw his companion unsheath his scout ax and begin chopping at a stout hickory tree, perhaps three inches in diameter. He wondered vaguely what Handy expected to do with it and how he hoped to pull poor Roundy Magoon to firm land again. They had tried once with a long pole; that effort had been a failure. He could think of no advantage to be gained by using a thicker, heavier tree. And yet he knew, down in his heart, that the other must have some plan, and that the plan would succeed.

By the time he had returned with the rope, Handy had chopped down the tree and carried it close to a stump on the edge of the bog. He tossed one end of the rope to Roundy, telling him to tie it about his body,

just below the arms. Then, pulling it taut, he fastened the other end to the tip of his tree-pole.

"Now, Roundy," he remarked pleasantly, "we are going to give you some information about levers."

"I want to get out," wailed Roundy.

"This stump," continued Handy, "will be the axis or fulcrum. This pole I have cut down will represent the arms, one in each direction from the fulcrum. On one end, attached to the rope, is the weight — meaning you. On the other, pushing toward you and thus pulling the other end of the pole in the opposite direction, is the power — that's us. Do you understand the principle?"

"That won't help any," snarled Roundy. "I'll come out straight as easily as I will when you pull me around a stump. And I — want — to — get — out!"

"But wait," cautioned Handy, winking at Bunny. "That's where the principle of the lever comes in. We don't pull you out straight, not because we lack the strength, but because you lack the — er — lightness. So we use the lever. We push it along till the distance from the stump to your end — from the fulcrum to the weight — is twice as great as the distance from the stump to us, and — what happens?"

"Nothing, I 'spose, except that I stay stuck."

"Well, you may be right, at that," grinned Handy.

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"But the answer in the book is that we will have twice as much power as we would with the stump in the middle — or without any lever at all. Get that?"

Roundy was sullenly silent. Handy sat down on the stump and began to whistle. Presently the two hands in the mud splashed weakly in surrender.

"What do you want me to do, anyhow?"

"Learn your lesson," said Handy severely. "Here's the rule: 'A given power will support a weight as many times as great as itself as the power arm is times as long as the weight arm.'"

"Why should I learn that — rigmarole?"

"So you'll know how we were able to pull you out — we 'kids,' and so you'll know how to figure when your turn comes to fish somebody out of a mud-hole. This lever idea is a good thing to know; most scouts aren't as big and muscular as they might be, but they can manage to match a man's strength this way."

There was silence for a time. Then a weak voice piped: "Say the rule again for me, will you?"

Handy quoted it slowly and distinctly. Like an echo from the quagmire, Roundy repeated it after him. Then, with a shout of encouragement, and a wave of his hand for Bunny to join him, the adapter of the lever principle put his shoulder to the pole.

The hickory bent, the rope tautened and snapped.

Out in the mud, Roundy gave a prodigious grunt, and, helping with arms and legs, came loose with a wailing *glu-u-uck!* In another second he had scrambled to firm land.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later the three of them walked into camp. Handy saluted gravely.

“Here is the missing man, sir,” he said. “Bunny and I brought him in.”

Scout Master Stanton stared at Roundy Magoon. How on earth — But the explanations could come later.

“Roundy,” he said, “I think you’d better take a swim in the lake. A scout, you know, keeps clean in body.”

“Yes, sir,” agreed the unhappy Roundy, moving away.

“And, Roundy —”

“Sir?”

“When you go in swimming,” the scout master concluded, “don’t bother to take off your clothes.”

CHAPTER V

KREEEE!

As Bunny Payton sat on a rock at the top of the hill, dejectedly kicking pebbles down its side, he stiffened suddenly at the cry. From the north it came, shrill and triumphant, a piercing challenge to all the world:

“Kreeee! Kreeee! Kreeee!”

The boy sprang to his feet and peered toward its source. At first, even with eyes shaded by his open hand, he could see nothing at all; then, growing from a tiny speck in the sky to a stately monarch of the air, drifting upon it with no appreciable flutter of wings, came an eagle. It soared over him, circling, and dropped from sight behind the fringe of trees that lay between his hill and the water's edge. And, although he waited patiently, scarcely breathing, he did not see it again.

After a bit, with a sigh of disappointment, the boy sank back upon the rock and resumed his task of kicking pebbles down the side of the hill. He had never

seen an eagle before; the brief glimpse had been only tantalizing. All things were like that, he told himself. You were allowed to discover how good it was to see something, or hear something, or be something, and then, just when you are reaching out for it, bang! it was whisked away.

The trouble was, he had been banished from the midst of the Black Eagle Patrol, and it had hurt more than he cared to admit. Two or three hours before, it wouldn't have mattered in the least; he could have gone from the fellows with a superior grin, waving a pitying hand at them because they had allowed themselves to be tied up as Boy Scouts. But now, not because Cousin Buck had urged it, not because little Specs had tried to bully him out of it, but because it was the one thing he wanted most in all the world, he longed to become that tag numeral — number 8 of the Black Eagle Patrol.

For he had eaten with them, and the memory of the meal was still with him. He could see the scouts preparing it: Judge and Nap spreading an emergency sail from the launch as a table, and distributing plates and knives and forks; S. S. and Specs bringing water from a spring; Roundy, clean but not wholly dry as yet, slowly and deliberately cutting bread, peeling potatoes, and slicing bacon; Handy and Bi building a fireplace

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by the very simple method of placing two green logs on the ground, side by side, but closer at one end than at the other; and, finally, Bi touching off the fire by means of his newly acquired skill as a rubber of sticks.

The smell of pine, of fir and balsam, had been in the air. And then, gradually overpowering these, had come other odors: coffee, steaming and boiling over; bacon, crisping on a hot griddle; potatoes, sliced very thin, browning in its grease; corn, still wrapped in the husk, roasting in the embers. And everything cooked, mind you, to the queen's taste.

They had eaten like ravenous savages, Bunny with the rest. Never had he tasted anything as good; never had he enjoyed a meal more. Then, when they were finished, Mr. Stanton told Bunny something about the Boy Scout idea: how General Robert Baden-Powell organized a club in England, after being greatly impressed by the manner in which the boys in Africa, during the Boer war, learned to take care of themselves in the wilderness while acting as scouts for the army; how Ernest Thompson Seton started the "Seton Indians" in this country to teach the boys to make camps, build fires, find their way through the forests, and follow trails; and how these two men met and evolved the Boy Scout movement.

Then Mr. Stanton had paused for a moment, idly poking at the fire. When he spoke again, it was to nobody in particular.

“There are lots of boys,” he had said, “who would like to know the green outdoors — the plants and the trees, the birds and the animals. They would like to know the birds from their songs, and the animals from their tracks in the soft earth. And there are lots of boys who would like to camp out in the dense woods, and know how to do it comfortably, as the Indians did, and the pioneer white men. And there are lots of boys, too, who would like to live the tales of courage and heroism they have read; who would like to meet romance out in the open. Well, that’s what scouting means to-day.

“But it means more. As it applies to Boy Scouts, it means expert knowledge of riding, swimming, tramping, trailing, photography, first aid, camping, handicraft, loyalty, obedience, courtesy, thrift, courage, and kindness. It seems to me — Bunny, would you like those things I’ve been talking about?”

The boy could still recall the thrill that had gone up his backbone at the question. Like those things? Why, weren’t they what every boy liked? He hadn’t understood till now, though, that you could master them by becoming a Boy Scout. But like them!

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"I certainly would!" he had told the scout master enthusiastically.

And then — Well, it was like the eagle he had wanted to study. Mr. Stanton had risen briskly, as if he had wasted enough time talking, and said:

"Bunny, the patrol is going to hold a business meeting now. You know, we must elect a new leader in place of your cousin. As only members may be present —"

"You'd like me to go away for a while?"

"Exactly!" Mr. Stanton had said. "If you'll climb to that rock on the hill yonder, you will find the view worth the trouble."

There had been nothing else to do. He couldn't stay where he wasn't wanted, of course, and he had climbed the hill and slouched down on the rock, kicking dejectedly at the pebbles about it.

Again a cry roused him from his dreaming.

"Kreeee!" it shrilled. "Kreeee! Kreeee!"

At first, startled, he thought the eagle had returned, and looked upward, fully expecting to see the stately sweep of wings against the sky. Then, as it sounded again, he traced it, and laughed softly to himself. True enough, it was the call of the eagle, but it came from a human throat. One of the members of the Black Eagle Patrol was signaling.

But to whom? Bunny waited a long minute in breathless silence for an answering call. None came. He wanted to throw back his head and repeat the shrill cry himself, but that would not be right, of course. In a few days, or a few weeks, when he became a scout —

“Kreeee!” it came again. And then, on the end, like the “tiger” of a college cheer, “Oh-h-h, Bunny!”

There was a limit to everything. If the fellows insisted on linking that piercing cry of the eagle with his own nickname, they might know what to expect. Defiantly, yet with a thrill of honest enjoyment, Bunny Payton tilted his chin upward, opened his mouth a little, and shrilled back, “Kreeee! Kreeee! Kreeee!”

When he joined the group a minute later, his quick eye caught new expressions on some of the faces. All of the fellows seemed to be regarding him with unusual interest. He thought guiltily of the signal he had answered and began to wish he had not yielded to the temptation.

“Well,” he began awkwardly, “did you get your business done?”

“All done,” answered Scout Master Stanton. “Judge is now patrol leader, to succeed your cousin,

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with Bi the assistant; we advanced each scout one position, so that Specs is now seven instead of eight; and —”

As the man paused, Bunny was conscious that each of the fellows was watching him closely. He looked about the circle with wondering eyes.

“— and,” concluded Mr. Stanton, “we voted to accept you as the next member of the patrol. As soon as you have qualified for tenderfoot, therefore, you will be sworn in as a Black Eagle.”

The world seemed to turn topsy-turvy. Boys and trees and sky and lake blurred hopelessly. With a quick gesture, Bunny Payton swept his hand across his eyes.

“You mean that as soon as — as —”

“When you know the scout law, sign, salute, and significance of the badge —”

“I know them now, sir,” said the boy. “I’ve had Buck explain everything to me.” As if to prove his knowledge, he held up his right hand, with three fingers extended, and thumb and little finger touching across the palm. Gravely, but with the unwavering certainty of one who has practiced it often, he raised the hand to his forehead in salute.

Scout Master Stanton answered it. A moment’s quick questioning proved the truth of the boy’s state-

ment. It was obvious that he knew quite as much about scoutcraft as the average tenderfoot.

“Do you know the composition and history of the national flag, and the customary forms of respect due to it?”

“I do, sir,” Bunny told him promptly; and he gave the necessary information without halting.

“Can you tie the required knots?”

Bunny looked around. Divining the object of his search, Judge tossed him a short piece of hemp rope, which had been “whipped” at the ends to prevent fraying. With sure fingers, the boy fashioned in quick succession a bowline, a sheepshank, a halter, and a clove-hitch knot, each tied rapidly, each holding fast as he pulled it tight, and each coming undone easily afterward. He was preparing to try a fifth when Mr. Stanton stopped him.

“We only require four,” he said, “and as there’s a storm coming up, we must not waste time. But I think it is only fair to allow you to take the scout oath now — if you wish.”

If he wished! The whole thing had come so suddenly that he was still a little dazed. But he knew well enough that he couldn’t wait; he wanted to join the scouts that very instant. If he wished!

“Please!” he begged a little incoherently. “Now!”

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From the south came the fringe of the approaching wind. Trees bowed to it, and leaves fluttered. Somewhere in the distance the thunder rolled chokingly.

"Very well," said the scout master, quite as if he had not heard the sound. "You may repeat the oath after me."

"I know it by heart," confessed Bunny.

Mr. Stanton nodded. Bareheaded, with his hair blowing in the breeze, the boy stepped forward. Once more he held up his right hand, palm to the front, thumb resting on the nail of the little finger, the other three fingers upright and together.

The breeze had been a vagrant. It was gone now, leaving in its place a perfect calm, which made the words of the oath singularly impressive.

"On my honor," the boy repeated solemnly, "I will do my best:

"1. To do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the scout law;

"2. To help other people at all times;

"3. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

As he finished, Scout Master Stanton grasped his hand.

"Tenderfoot Payton," he said, "I congratulate you;

you may now consider yourself a member of the Black Eagle Patrol.”

Tenderfoot Payton threw back his head and lifted his chin till it pointed toward the approaching storm in the South.

“Kreeee!” he called loudly, that all the world might hear, and proudly, as one who at last had the right.
“Kreeee! Kreeee!”

The echo was a distant thunderclap.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE NIGHT

“And now,” said Scout Master Stanton briskly, “I think it’s about time to break camp, before that storm hits us. Sure you can manage the launch, Handy, if the lake gets lumpy?”

“Sure of it, sir,” returned Handy with quiet confidence.

“How about the canoe, Bi?”

“Well, we’ve got a good twenty minutes before the real wind comes,” promised Bi, squinting critically at the jagged bits of cloud that were scurrying across the sky. “If we start now, we ought to be able to paddle to the mainland before the wind gets too fresh.”

“Then,” said Mr. Stanton promptly, “let’s run for it.” And, quite as if he were a boy himself, he leaped lightly over the logs that made the fireplace and started down the hill behind them.

“They leave their canoe down there because it’s a little closer than the beach where we land,” Handy explained to Bunny. “Too shallow just off shore for the launch, though, and —”

He was interrupted by a quick order of Judge’s.

Without waiting to complete the sentence, Handy jumped to his feet, ready and eager to fulfill whatever duties might be assigned him. This loyal response to the call of the leader pleased Bunny immensely. It kindled his respect for both Handy and Judge. He, too, sprang up.

“What can I do?” he asked, saluting.

Judge told him in a matter-of-fact way, but Bunny caught the gleam of satisfaction in the patrol leader’s eyes. It was exactly as if Judge had reached out and shaken his hand. Bunny bent to his work with a song in his heart.

When they had packed everything that was to be taken home, and pulled apart the logs of the fireplace, and poured water on the smoldering embers, and buried the refuse of the supper, leaving the place as spick and span as they had found it, Judge led the way down the twisting path to the beach. Bunny recalled that it came down to the sandy shore at a point some fifty feet from the launch.

By this time the wind was beginning to whistle, and the clouds that banked up in the west promised an unusually short span of twilight. So dark was it already, indeed, that Bunny could not see the launch as they emerged from the path to the beach. Ahead of him, also peering, Judge and the others had stopped ab-

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ruptly, as if startled. Bunny looked again. As his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, the scene became more distinct.

He could follow, for a hundred feet, the line where sand and water met. He could see the eager little waves lapping the shore. He could make out a bit of driftwood thrown up on the beach — a rock — the tree to which Roundy had fastened the line from the launch — the — No, there was no longer any doubt about it. The boat was gone!

A nervous hand clutched Bunny's arm. A trembling voice spoke into his right ear. It was Roundy's.

"Wha-what is it? Did you see the — bear?"

"The bear? I — What bear?"

But before Roundy could explain, the others had discovered that the launch was missing. They rushed forward. Everybody seemed to be trying to talk at once, and the hubbub raged and lulled like the roaring wind. Presently Judge came over toward the two in the background.

"Roundy," he said sharply, "did you make the launch fast?"

"I tried to, yes."

"Tie the line firmly to the tree?"

"Yes, sir, I — I think so."

"What kind of a knot?"

"I — I don't exactly recall, Judge."

"Roundy," said the patrol leader severely, "you have violated a part of the first scout law. You have been trusted on your honor to do exactly a given task, and you have failed. You aren't trustworthy in little things; you don't do them thoroughly. Now, as a result of your carelessness, we are marooned here on Shadow Island."

"Three cheers!" called S. S., quite missing the point of the reprimand.

"Do you suppose Napoleon was glad to be sent to St. Helena?" Nap reproved him.

"Well," concluded Judge, "we won't talk about your weaknesses any more just now, Roundy. We can't, if we're to keep cheerful. And there's no use staying down on this windy beach, either. Suppose we climb the hill to our old place and build a good camp-fire?"

As the boys marched up the winding path again, Bunny turned back to S. S., who happened to be just behind him. "Judge was pretty hard on Roundy, wasn't he?"

"Oh, I don't think so. He might have made him hand over his scout badge, you know."

"But he didn't do anything really wrong," persisted Bunny. "I've been as careless as that lots of times."

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“Better not be again,” advised S. S., with a chuckle, “if you expect to stick with the Black Eagle Patrol. Well, here we are on the old camping-ground once more. What now, Judge?”

“Kindling first,” returned the leader. “Everybody scout for it — leaves, twigs, dead branches, dry bits of wood, and other stuff like that.”

Five minutes later the fire was blazing cheerfully. The dead leaves had been touched with a match; then, as they flared up, they had been thatched loosely with the twigs and branches, that there might be plenty of air for draft; and, finally, the heavier sticks had been placed on these, as the flames licked upward, till the camp-fire was as large as Judge thought wise.

“You fellows know the Indian saying,” he laughed. “‘White man heap fool, make um big fire — can’t get near! Injun make um little fire — get close! Ugh! Good!’”

It wasn’t a big fire, to be sure, but Bunny found it wonderfully appealing. They squatted about it like Indians, and talked, and sang, and told stories, and listened to the roaring wind in the tree-tops. The storm itself had passed them to the westward, but they were apparently in the full swing of the gale that carried it along.

Presently, as they lapsed into silence before the

trumpeting of the wind, Bunny fell to studying the faces about the golden circle and to watching the tongues of flame that pierced the blackness of the night. Occasional sparks shot upward, searing their way through the darkness, sometimes blotting out in mid-air, sometimes falling like comets. To the left of the camp-fire, for example, there was one space that seemed always aglow with a popping ember, that rose and fell, and rose and fell —

“Judge!” called the tenderfoot of the Black Eagle Patrol.

“Well?”

“There’s a light over yonder — a torch or a lantern or something — that keeps waving up and down time after time. I thought first it was a spark from the fire, but —”

“Where? Show me!” said the patrol leader quickly, kneeling just behind him. He followed the boy’s pointing finger. “I thought so! One — two; one — two; one — two. That’s E.”

“What is it?” asked Bunny curiously.

“The torch wig-wag,” explained Judge. “Mr. Stanton must be signaling to us. It’s over on the mainland. He’s spelling the letter E, one wave to the right and one to the left. That means he is trying to call us. Wait.”

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He snatched a burning stick from the fire. Facing the blackness from which the signal glowed, Judge held his torch high above his head. Then, so rapidly that Bunny could hardly follow his movements, he swung it in a wide arc to his left. Twice he repeated this swing; twice more; then he lowered the torch straight down in front of his body, immediately returning it to a position above his head.

Bunny sidled over close to Handy, who was watching Judge intently and spelling out the message. "Two — two," he counted; "two — two; three."

"What does that mean?" asked Bunny, feeling as helpless as if he were quite blind. He promised himself that the next time he saw a wig-wagging torch, he would be able to read it like a book.

"That's the acknowledgment of the call," Handy explained readily. "It's the code for 'I understand.' Now Mr. Stanton knows we are ready to receive any message he may want to send. There it is."

"Read me what he says, please!" begged the new member of the patrol, watching the queer streaks of moving fire that gored the black sky.

Handy nodded. "'What — is — wrong?'" he interrupted, studying the flashes. Then, as Judge drew a fresh blazing torch from the fire, raised it above his

head, and swung it to right and left and straight downward, he spelled out the words of the answer:

“ ‘Boat — gone — adrift.’ ”

The questions and answers were now flashing rapidly.

“ ‘Came — ashore — here,’ ” reported the distant torch. “ ‘All — safe?’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ ” was Judge’s terse response.

“ ‘Lake — too — rough — come — after — you — advise — camping — for — night — if — boys — not — afraid.’ ”

“Aw, shucks!” protested Bi indignantly, quite as if Mr. Stanton had spoken the words aloud; and “What does he think we are?” asked Specs warmly. The others grunted impatiently. Each had been reading the messages word for word.

“ ‘No — cowards — here,’ ” was Judge’s quick response to this challenge, according to Handy; and Bunny threw back his shoulders with a little gesture of pride. His courage was no longer doubted.

“ ‘Have — notified — parents,’ ” signaled the scout master. “ ‘Mrs. — Zane — says — tell — S. S. — not — forget — use — tooth-brush.’ ”

Bi howled his glee over this admonition, while poor Spick and Span slunk back into the darkness of the shadows. His mother didn’t need to let the whole

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world know he was required to carry a tooth-brush.

“ ‘ Build — thatched — lean-to,’ ” came the next message. “ ‘ Make — bed — balsam — or — hemlock — branches — use — sail — understand? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes,’ ” answered the laconic Judge. Handy explained his fondness for this word by telling Bunny it was abbreviated to the letter y in the code, which was one — one — one, or merely three swings to the right. “ ‘ Will — build — at — once — good — night.’ ”

“ ‘ Good — night,’ ” flashed the distant torch. It blazed brightly for a moment; then the blackness of the night seemed to close about it and snuff it out.

Judge piled wood on the camp-fire, stick on stick, till it was blazing furiously, with flames that leaped high into the air and lighted clearly the surrounding space. A brief search revealed what he wanted — two trees some ten feet apart, with branches six or eight feet above the ground. Between these two trees he placed a long pole, and, slanting outward from it to the ground, like the gently sloping roof of a house, other poles that were brought him by the boys. These were criss-crossed by still others, until the lean-to was a checker-board of saplings and dead limbs. Upon this framework were thatched scores and scores of branches or fans of balsam and hemlock, making a roof that would keep out dew and that would resist rain for a

long time. The same material that was used for a roof served also for the bed.

So familiar was Judge with the construction of a lean-to, and so willing were his workers, that it seemed to the awed Bunny no time at all before the shelter was completed. It was not a house, nor yet a tent, but the soft, springy, fragrant bed under a fellow's body and the leafy, rustling roof over a fellow's head made it all any one might wish. Bunny said as much to Roundy, as they rested from their labors.

"Oh, it's not so bad," conceded Roundy, "but"—he looked behind him, toward the dark shadows of the woods, and shuddered—"but what good would it be against a bear?"

"Bear!" exclaimed Bunny, recalling the interrupted conversation down on the beach. "What bear?"

"The one that chased me this afternoon. You see, after I fixed the launch, I followed you fellows up the path. I guess I didn't turn off the right place to get here; anyhow, I wandered on past a bit. I heard a noise in the path behind me, and stopped to see which one of you was in sight. Well, sir, there was a big, brown, shaggy animal loping after me. It was a bear. I knew. I ran as fast as I could, turned a bend in the path, ducked into the brush at one side, crashed through the undergrowth, raced down the side of the hill, and

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was skipping over that boggy place at the bottom when I began to sink. Then — Well, you and Handy showed up, and — and that's all."

Bunny should have been excited about the bear, of course. But he wasn't. He thought of the story he had woven for Handy: how Roundy here had been chasing something, and had been winded and thirsty after getting through the brush, and had presumably gone to the spring for a drink. And here was Roundy smashing all his theories to smithereens. It left Bunny feeling guilty, somehow, exactly as he might have felt if he had told a lie. It subdued him, moreover; he wasn't as smart as he had thought himself.

"Oh, well, bears wouldn't come up to a fire," he told Roundy carelessly. He wasn't sure whether this was true or not, but he thought he remembered reading it somewhere. Roundy merely sniffed.

Judge fixed the camp-fire for the night. S. S. removed his coat and folded it neatly. All of them loosened their shirts at the necks, and unlaced their shoes, preparatory to kicking them off. Then Nap, official bugler of the patrol, took his horn from its leather case, and, during a lull of the roaring wind, blew the sweet, clear notes of "taps."

Next to Bunny, S. S. was the smallest of the patrol. The new member looked at him expectantly, watching

to see if he would tumble into bed first. Instead, S. S. dropped to his knees and bowed his head beside the bed.

It came to the astonished Bunny, all at once, that the boy was praying. He could feel his own face flush. He prayed at home himself, of course; every fellow in a good home did that. But it must take courage to dare the taunts of — And then Bunny looked at the others.

They were all praying, simply, honestly, naturally, quite as if there could be no thought of overlooking this final word to Him.

Bunny's hands clenched into hard fists. The flush on his face burned now like fire. Only a few hours before, in this very spot, he had sworn to do his duty to God, and he had promised to be reverent and faithful in his religious duties. Yet it had needed this example to make him bow his head.

"You coward!" he told himself, remembering his complacency when Judge had signaled to Mr. Stanton. "No — cowards — here. Yes, that's what you are — a coward!"

It was no matter of courage now, after the others had prayed; but Judge smiled, as he saw this new boy kneel. There had been a time, not so very long ago, when Judge, as tenderfoot in another patrol, had

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learned this same lesson. It was one no fellow ever forgot.

The bed of balsam, as Bunny had said, was soft and springy and fragrant. The leafy roof rustled softly. The wind crooned a lullaby. Almost before his body had sunk comfortably into the leaves, he was sound asleep.

He woke with a start. It seemed to him hours must have passed, but he had no way of telling. It was still night, but the wind had died out, and frightened-looking clouds skulked across the sky. Something had roused him from —

Then he heard it again: a cry that stiffened his backbone like a ramrod. It began as a scream, a screech, discordant and horrible, and ended with a long, mournful wail.

He sat up suddenly. The fire was a mere red blur, but as he tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes, a dry stick blazed up like a beacon. While it flared, he turned to see if anybody else was awake. Each of the others slept like a baby.

Bunny set his teeth. In the very act of reaching over to touch Judge's shoulder, he halted his arm. He had been a coward in enough different ways for one day. Even if this howling beast should be a bear, it might come no nearer.

He shivered a little. The night air was cool; it would do no harm, certainly, to stir up the fire. So he crept silently over to it, and poked it until it crackled and burned with both heat and light. What was it he had told Roundy? Oh, yes — that bears wouldn't come up to a fire. He wondered if he had really read that or just conceived it as a retort to Roundy. He couldn't be sure.

The scream rang out again, more terrifying than before, followed hard by the wailing "ba-aw-ow-ow!"

Bunny cringed back in fresh alarm. The animal was much nearer than it had been at the last call; it was closing in on the camp.

The boy threw fresh wood upon the fire, stirring desperately at the glowing embers. Back of him, on the balsam bed, somebody moved uneasily. And once more, from a point only two or three hundred yards down the hill, came the double cry, half jangling screech, half deep-lunged baying.

Did bears circle a camp, awaiting a favorable opportunity to spring upon their victims? Or did they come rushing in, afraid of neither man nor beast? Bunny wished he knew.

He could hear it now as it rushed up the hill, its body swishing against bushes and weeds. And back of it,

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down toward the shore, he could hear low rumbles, like roars or growls. Perhaps —

“What’s the matter, Bunny?”

It was Judge’s low voice in his ear. Even before he was through speaking, the awful scream came again.

“That’s a screech-owl,” explained Judge. “After you’ve been with us a while, you’ll know most of the birds and animals when you hear them.”

“Ba-aw-ow-ow!” wailed the other cry, now almost on top of them.

“You know what that is, of course?” the patrol leader asked.

“Is it a — bear?”

“No, just a dog; a hound, to be exact. And, unless I am very much mistaken, it’s Bi’s. If it is — Hello, old fellow.”

This last was a greeting to a dog that came bounding into the circle of light. Almost on his heels, Bi Jones and Scout Master Stanton pushed forward. As they came into sight, the owl, somewhere down the hill, screeched mournfully, and the dog bayed his defiance. This brought the other scouts tumbling out of their beds.

“Ready to break camp!” boomed Scout Master Stanton. “Bi and I are here with the launch; it looks

like rain, and there are some worried parents across on the mainland. Hustle, everybody!”

Roundy came from the lean-to, rubbing his eyes. “Who owns that dog?” he demanded suddenly.

“I do,” said Bi. “Had him here this afternoon, but he wandered off on an exploring trip about the time you started to — er — clean up for supper. Didn’t see him before, did you?”

“I might have,” said Roundy cautiously. “He looks something like a bear to me.”

Two hours later, in his little room in Uncle Henry Sawyer’s house, Bunny lay in bed, listening to the patter of rain on the shingled roof close above him.

“It’s been a wonderful day,” he told himself for the twentieth time; “the most wonderful day I ever lived. If I hadn’t joined the Black Eagle Patrol, I might never have known how many things there are to know, or how many I ought to know, or” — here he pressed his lips hard together — “how many I’m going to know. Let’s see, now; Judge says a bear goes ‘Boorrr!’ and a screech-owl —”

“George!”

“Yes, uncle?”

“Turn over, George; you’re talking in your sleep.”

CHAPTER VII

THE BLOW-OUT

It was a merry melody that Bunny Payton whistled as he propelled the broom around the irregular floor of the porch. He did not enjoy sweeping, but a most important scout law is to be cheerful, and it is a good deal more sensible to whistle merrily when you are by yourself than to smile merrily. Besides, whistling is much easier. Therefore, Bunny Payton whistled.

"All done!" he announced, as his aunt appeared in the doorway. "Wasn't that a quick job?"

The woman regarded him curiously for a moment without speaking. "George Payton," she said at last, "tell me, are you a good Boy Scout?"

Bunny drew himself up. "You bet I am," he said proudly. "I'm only a tenderfoot now, but I'll be a first-class scout in no time. I live up to all the laws, too: I'm trustworthy; I'm loyal; I'm helpful; I'm —"

"You read me the list of laws the other night," his aunt interrupted. "But I wish you'd tell Mr. Stanton to put in a law or two about porch-sweeping."

"I do things all right, and I do them quick," he de-

fended himself. "Why, last night we had a drill giving first aid to the injured, and I was quicker than any of the others. I know just as much about it as they do, even if I've only been a scout for two weeks. Then I carry around one of the Red Cross First Aid Kits, too." He tapped his coat pocket.

"You're perfection itself," laughed his aunt, pretending to chase him off the porch with the broom. "Go along with the rest of the boys now, and tell Mr. Stanton to draft a scout law about porch-sweeping."

Bunny ran off, feeling strangely uncomfortable. Why wasn't he a good Boy Scout? He was trustworthy, surely, and kind, and he lived up to all the laws. Last night, in the first aid drill, he had finished when S. S. was only half through, and S. S. was supposed to be the best of them all. But the joy of falling in with the rest of the patrol drove this mild worry from his head. They were all waiting at the big maple tree half a mile beyond Mr. Stanton's house, at the foot of the gentle rise.

"Hello, Bunny," called S. S. "You're too late this morning to have a vote. We've decided to play 'Duck-on-the-Rock.'"

"That suits me," said Bunny happily. "Where do we play?"

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Judge pointed to the top of the little hill. "There's an old stone fence up there where we can get all the rocks we want."

"Beat you to the top," challenged Specs.

The next instant the eight boys were racing wildly up the road.

It was the first time Bunny had had a fair chance to match his speed with that of his new friends, and it pleased him to notice that his running was better than theirs. By the time he reached the spring that bubbled into the horse-trough, he had caught Specs and Judge, while the others were pounding along in the rear, safely distanced. It was not easy, but he put on an extra spurt in his endeavor to pass the two by his side. Specs answered with a sprint of his own, but Judge, unable to accept the challenge, began dropping behind. The going was hard, but the two leaders maintained their pace, running even, stride for stride.

The top of the rise was a bare fifty yards away, and Bunny was gathering his strength for a final burst of speed, when a sharp cry from S. S. halted him. He turned his head to look and immediately pulled himself up.

Fifteen yards behind them, Judge was stretched motionless upon the road.

By the time Bunny and Specs had sprinted back to the fallen patrol leader, S. S. had turned Judge over upon his back and was running quick fingers over his head for bruises or cuts.

"I tripped," explained Judge after a minute or two. "Hit my forehead when I came down." Assisted by S. S. and Bi, he managed to stand upright, looking around dizzily.

"Want my First Aid Kit?" suggested Bunny. "I've got it here in my pocket."

Judge shook his head. "No, thanks. The skin's not broken. But there's an idea! I'm too shaken to play Duck-on-the-Rock now, so what's the matter with a first aid race? Four of us can be laid out with broken legs, and the other four can chase out and get splints, and the one that ties up his man's broken leg first can be patrol surgeon till next Saturday."

Roundy flopped down on a soft spread of grass. "Let somebody else be patrol surgeon," he said; "I've got a broken leg."

Judge sat down beside Roundy, with Specs next, and Handy fourth. Nap declared himself surgeon for Roundy; S. S. chose Specs; Bi picked out Handy; and Bunny was assigned to Judge.

The patrol leader gave the final instructions. "We're going to suppose," he said, "that the legs are

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broken between the knee and the ankle. Each of you fellows must find two splints and tie them on with handkerchiefs, or neckties, or whatever you can get. The first to finish will win. All ready? Go!"

The four started on even terms. Back of the road ran a broken-stranded barbed-wire fence; behind that stood a little grove; just beyond was a deserted, tumbled-down barn. Bunny and S. S. wriggled through the fence together, but Bi was delayed by a barb that caught his trousers. Nap, instead of trying to cross the fence at all, hurried away down the road. It was plain to Bunny that the race was to be run by S. S. and himself, and he was glad of it, because this would give him a chance to prove himself better than the best in the patrol. He knew he could outrun S. S., and he felt sure he could beat him at bandaging.

He reached the grove slightly in the lead, and turned at once for the nearest dead tree. To his surprise, Specs and Bi did not stop, but ran on toward the old barn. Bunny chuckled to himself. They had not thought of dead branches as splints. Well, so much the worse for them! He broke off two slight limbs, and, trimming away the twigs as he ran, hustled back over the ground to his injured man.

"Good for you!" said Judge, as Bunny dropped his splints and pulled a piece of strong cord from his

pocket. "You'll beat 'em all, even if you are only a tenderfoot."

Bunny's heart warmed at the praise. He wanted to succeed in everything he undertook, and here was a chance, not only to succeed, but to win out splendidly.

He had just broken the branches to the proper length when Specs raised a protest. "I object," he said. "Those splints are no good; they're not strong enough. If you ever used those on a regular broken leg, they'd crack sure, and make the fracture worse than ever."

Bunny had stopped his preparations for bandaging. He was surprised and hurt. Judge picked up one of the splints; it snapped between his fingers. He looked at Bunny, frowning. "Have you read the scout laws — all of them?" he asked.

Bunny stared in pained amazement. "Of course."

"Better read them again," said Judge deliberately, rising to his feet. "Because as a scout, I don't think you're quite as good as you think you are."

The words stung. But as Bunny stood there, not quite certain whether he would have to wink back a stray tear or two, Specs changed the subject by springing to his feet with a loud "Sa-a-a-ay!"

It was a purring giant of a motor-car that topped

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the crest of the hill just as S. S., Bi, and Nap reached their patients, splints in hand.

"It's one of those Italian makes," said S. S., quite forgetting the game at sight of the big black beauty.

The boys stood silent in admiration. Even Bunny forgot his unpleasant thoughts long enough to notice the gray-haired man driving, the black-haired girl by his side, and, on the back seat, as if he were a passenger of honor, a little tan spaniel.

"If I had one of those cars," began Specs softly, watching it whizz by; "if I had one of —"

"Bang!"

The sound of the blow-out of the tire reached them at the same instant that the machine, swerving suddenly from its course, crashed head-on into the trunk of the great maple.

What followed seemed no more real to Bunny than a moving picture. He wanted to close his eyes or turn his head away, but he could do neither. Almost unbelieving what he saw, he watched the whole accident from the initial crash into the tree to the final upset of the car.

As the automobile bowled over grotesquely upon its side, a cloud of steam and dust hid for a moment all sight of the passengers. Then, as the patrol, like one man, started for the smash-up, Bunny perceived

the white of the girl's dress on the bank and a crumpled, brown figure stirring feebly beside the tree.

As they ran, Judge shouted directions. "Handy, you look out for the machine. Bi and S. S., take the girl. Specs, you and I will handle the man. The rest of you, pitch in and help."

In spite of the horror of the accident, Bunny could but feel a thrill of pleasurable excitement in this dash to the rescue. He followed Handy, and, trembling a little at the danger of a possible explosion, helped him open the hood and disconnect the wires. Once the machine had been made safe, he turned to Judge and Specs, who, with the assistance of Nap, were trying to keep the man flat on his back.

"He's dazed," said Judge, as the victim of the accident muttered incoherent words. "Handy, help Nap keep his legs still. Bunny, you get some water from the spring."

The tenderfoot went, although not too willingly. Why had Judge not chosen him for expert assistance? The night before he had shown himself much quicker at first aid than S. S. Yet here he was now, not even allowed to be near those who needed help. But, following orders, he soaked his cap and handkerchief in the water, filled the three folding cups that had been entrusted to him, and hurried back. By the time he

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returned, the man had become quiet. He was standing, still dazed and stupid from the shock, with Judge on one side of him and Handy on the other.

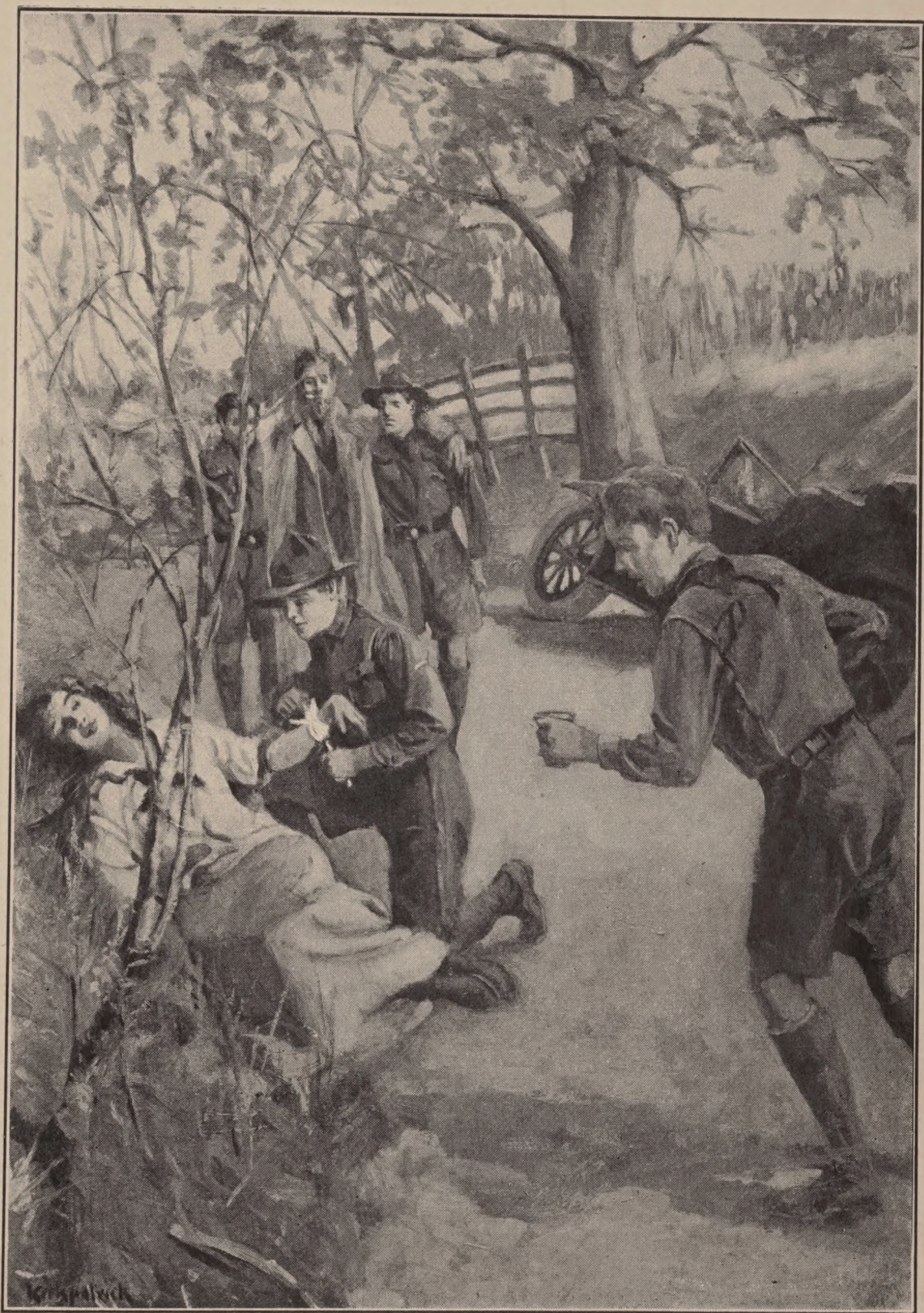
As Bunny brought the water, Bi came running up. "It's stopped, Judge," he reported to the patrol leader. "She isn't conscious, but she's all right. And the bleeding's checked." He explained rapidly to Bunny. "An artery in her wrist was cut, but S. S. put on a tourniquet that stopped it like a flash. Bring over some of your water."

The girl was lying on the bank, breathing faintly, but otherwise without movement. Bunny had seen prettier girls than this one, with her snub nose, and her freckles showing so plainly on the white face, but he had never seen a girl that looked more attractive. She seemed the sort that would make a good chum; the jolly, outdoor kind that would not scream at a mouse or a tumble. He felt an anger welling in him that S. S., rather than himself, had been chosen to save her life. Judge hadn't given him a square deal.

"Is there a telephone nearer than Stanton's?" demanded the patrol leader at this moment.

Nobody answered. "All right, Specs. You run to his house and 'phone for a doctor. Tell him to come there."

Specs raised his hand in salute. Putting his cap



“It’s stopped, Judge,” he reported to the patrol leader.
“She isn’t conscious, but she’s all right.” *Page 82.*

in his pocket, he started down the road at as high a speed as he could hope to maintain for the half-mile.

Judge continued his directions. "Nap, you and Handy and S. S. and Bi make a stretcher, and carry the girl. Roundy and I will take care of the man."

A quiver of disappointment shook Bunny. He was being left out of it all. In silence, he watched Handy commandeer a couple of stout staves and improvise a litter out of these and two buttoned coats. The four of them lifted the girl into place; then, in broken step, they started down the road after the others, bearing the litter between them. The man was now walking without much difficulty and seemed almost himself again.

"What do you want me to do?" Bunny called after Judge.

The older boy looked puzzled. "Why I — I don't know. You might keep your eye on the machine, or — here, find the dog. Look after him."

As he watched the six boys trudge slowly down the dusty road, there was bitterness in Bunny's heart. He was just as clever as S. S., but because he was a tenderfoot, they trusted him with nothing to look after save a no-account dog. It wasn't fair. Anyhow, he didn't want to stay behind; he wanted to be with the fellows.

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He looked about him with a sigh. There was no trace of the dog. He searched carefully near the machine, thinking the animal might have been crushed in the breakage. Then he went into the field by the roadside, whistling and calling. Still there was no sign of the dog. In his impatience, he was about to start down the road when a patch of tan fur at the top of the bank caught his eye.

It was the little spaniel, not dead, but so stunned and weakened that he seemed barely alive. He was licking a long, oozing cut along his hind leg, each time moving his head with what seemed an enormous effort.

For a moment, as Bunny stared at the poor creature, he was tempted to undo his Red Cross kit and tie up the wound as if the dog were a human being. But a second thought convinced him this would mean useless delay. So he carried the animal to the spring, washed off the wound, and tied it with his handkerchief, securing the bandage with his necktie. Once more he took the spaniel in his two arms.

The half-mile to the Stanton house seemed more nearly a full mile before he covered it, to be greeted by S. S. at the gate. S. S. was fairly bubbling with good humor.

“Say, Bunny, the doctor’s here, and he said we

saved her life, and he said the tourniquet I put on her arm was as good a one as he could have put on himself; and her father owns a big newspaper in Elkana, and he's going to give me a medal, and he's going to give another medal every year to the fellow in this patrol that's best at first aid."

It was not fair, Bunny reflected. He should have had this chance instead of S. S. He carried the spaniel into the hall, where the gray-haired man, Mr. Stanton, Doctor Quigley, and Judge were gathered.

"Here's Leader," cried the gray-haired man delightedly, and would have jumped from his chair if the doctor had not warned him back. "Molly will be tickled to pieces to see him."

Leader's tail wagged faintly. The doctor took the dog from Bunny's arms. "It seems to me you are all first aid people," he said smilingly. Then he turned to Bunny. "It's a pity you didn't have one of those first aid pocket outfits. You see, when a wound isn't bleeding much, it's better to leave it exposed than to tie it up with a handkerchief or anything of that sort. Too much danger of infection if you do. But you'll know next time," he finished encouragingly.

Humiliated and angry, Bunny somehow stumbled out into the sunshine. Judge followed him.

"Look here, Bunny," said the patrol leader, placing

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a friendly hand on the boy's shoulder; "you're doing one thing wrong, and you want to find out what it is before you go any further. You're breaking the very first of the scout laws, just as Roundy did that night on Shadow Island when he skimped the job of making fast the launch. You're not trustworthy. Oh, I know you wouldn't lie or steal or anything of that sort, but you do slipshod work in little things. You're in such a hurry to get through, that you don't do things thoroughly. That may be all right in a fifty-yard dash, but it won't work in first aid. Why, I couldn't have trusted you to make a tourniquet for the girl back there; you'd have done it in a hurry, but you might have overlooked something. S. S. did it —"

"I beat him in the practice last night," Bunny protested.

"In time, yes; you finished 'way ahead of him. But his work was all right, and yours was all wrong. The fellows didn't want to hurt your feelings, because you were a tenderfoot, but I think we were wrong; that's why I'm telling you now. If you're not thorough, you're not trustworthy. But you can be both, if you want to try."

Just before meal-time that noon, strange and unexpected sounds brought Mrs. Sawyer to the front porch. Bunny was sweeping industriously. His aunt

raised her eyebrows in amazement. Then she looked behind the lawn seat. For the first time since the boy had accepted the task of keeping clean the porch, that section of the floor was thoroughly, scrupulously swept. Five more corners she examined; they, too, were free of dust. Amazed, she turned from one cranny to another. Every spot was immaculate.

“George Payton,” she said, “what does this mean? Has Mr. Stanton drafted a new law about porch-sweeping?”

“No, ma’am,” responded Bunny, grinning a little sheepishly. “He doesn’t have to, I guess. It comes under one of the other laws that I — I didn’t quite understand.” Then he stood up very straight, facing her. “Aunt Emma,” he said, “next year they’re going to give a medal to the fellow that’s best at first aid — the quickest, you know, and the most thorough and trustworthy — and I’m going to get it.”

“I’m inclined to think,” admitted his aunt, looking at the spotless porch, “that you will, George.”

CHAPTER VIII

POM-POM-PULLAWAY

In the big open lot back of Grogan's hardware store, the scouts of the Black Eagle Patrol were about to begin a game of "pom-pom-pullaway." Seven of them already waited impatiently on a line near the Main Street side; when Mr. Stanton called to him from the sidewalk, the eighth, Judge Lloyd, was just turning to face them in the middle of the field.

"Coming, sir," answered the patrol leader obediently, walking from his position.

Mr. Stanton's keen eyes took in the situation at a glance. "I want to talk to you, Judge, but I don't want to break up the game. Suppose one of you other fellows 'stand' in his place."

Nobody stirred. Being "it" in this game was anything but an honor. Usually the selection of the unlucky "stander" was attended with considerable ceremony, based upon some variation of the "eenie-meenie-minie-mo" method of hitting upon the unfortunate. It was with no little comfort, therefore, that

the others presently saw Bunny step forward and heard him say: "I'll be 'it' in Judge's place."

Only Bi objected. "You're too little," he growled, "and too light. You couldn't stop me in a thousand years."

"Oh, he's all right," called the patrol leader from his perch on the fence, where he and Mr. Stanton had democratically seated themselves. "Start your game."

The scout master turned to the boy at his side. "Judge," he began, "I've been talking with Mr. Sefton, the man who was thrown from the automobile yesterday. He's very grateful, naturally. I suppose you know he owns the largest newspaper in Elkana?"

"Does he?" asked Judge carelessly, watching Bi break loose from little Bunny out in the field. "Maybe he'll tell his editor to write something in it about us."

"Yes, he intends to. He is very much interested in Boy Scouts, particularly after he saw your patrol at work yesterday and learned something about the fellows in it. He has decided to devote a column every day in his paper to news about the Boy Scouts of this State."

"Good for him!"

"But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about,"

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confessed Mr. Stanton. "Sefton is looking ahead. He believes his paper can double the number of patrols and troops in this section by creating a little competition among the boys. So he is going to announce a prize tournament, to be held next summer, for the purpose of determining the champion patrol of the State. The prize is to be a trip, all expenses paid by the paper, to the National Headquarters of the Boy Scouts of America, in New York City."

Judge slid slowly from the fence to the ground. The corners of his mouth twitched and turned up. From the tip of his chin to the top of his forehead, his face wrinkled into a beaming smile.

"We'll win that prize," he announced flatly.

"I'm afraid," said the scout master gently, "that we can't. It's as impossible —"

From the field came an interruption.

"Pom-pom-pullaway!" shouted Bunny. "Come away, or I'll fetch you away!"

On the heels of the challenge, the six scouts ran toward him, scattering to right and left as they came near. But Bunny had eyes for only one; he sprinted to the dodging Bi, held him for just an instant, and then felt his captive jerk free.

"— as impossible," the scout master concluded, "as it is to catch and hold Bi out there."

"But I want the Black Eagle Patrol to win," said Judge stubbornly.

"And Bunny wants to catch and hold Bi, too," reminded Mr. Stanton; "but wanting a thing very much doesn't always get it for you."

"Why couldn't we win?"

"There are many reasons, Judge. A baseball game is to be one of the features of the meet, with the patrol allowed as a ninth player some boy being trained for tenderfoot."

"And the Black Eagles haven't a recruit in sight. What else?"

"There will be field and track events."

"I see. And we haven't any gymnasium to practice in, or any track to run over. Go on."

"As a patrol, we are not very good at scoutcraft. Some of the members are good at certain things, but lamentably weak at others. The average is discouragingly low."

Judge nodded without speaking. Out in the field, Bunny called loudly: "Pom-pom-pullaway! Come away, or I'll fetch you away!" And when they dashed out at him, each intent upon passing safely to the opposite goal, he lunged at Bi, who pulled loose with scarcely an effort. Judge frowned a little at the sight.

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"But there must be a way out," he said presently. "It's a long time till the tournament."

"Pom-pom-pullaway! Come away or I'll fetch you away!" shouted Bunny.

"He's plucky," admitted Mr. Stanton, "but Bi will be running back and forth till they're all ready to quit."

Again the six scouts left the line under full speed, running straight forward till they were almost upon the "stander" before swerving away from him.

"Look!" urged Judge excitedly. "Bunny's found the way now, and in two minutes by the clock Mister Biceps Jones will be caught. Watch!"

As the boys passed him this time, Bunny paid no attention to Bi; instead, he swooped down upon the startled S. S., who proved an easy victim.

"Pom-pom-pullaway! Come away, or I'll fetch you away!" called these two in chorus.

Specs, who was fast and slippery and who usually managed to evade a single captor, fell before the double onslaught of Bunny and S. S. These three, combining, stopped Handy with neatness and dispatch; then, with his assistance, Nap. This left only Roundy and Bi on the goal line.

Roundy moved slowly, but as he ran, he gathered a momentum that made his capture a matter best handled

by several boys. Bunny could never have held him alone; Bunny and S. S. could not have done it together; Bunny and S. S. and Specs probably could not; it is doubtful, indeed, if Bunny and S. S. and Specs and Handy could have been certain of bringing him to a standstill. But with Nap added, the odds were overwhelming, and the fat boy offered little resistance.

Then the six of them pounced upon the mighty Bi, who was caught and held quite as easily as any of the others had been.

"There!" chortled Judge. "Did you see that, sir? Well, that's how we're going to win the prize next summer."

"Playing pom-pom-pullaway?"

"Oh, you know what I mean, sir. Remember Sanford Anvers, the rich kid we tried to get to join us last year? You talked to him once — alone; Buck argued with him once — alone; I tried to impress him once — alone. What we should have done was to go after him in a bunch, tuck him under our wing, and take him on a hike to show him what scouting really was. We'll get him yet. Put him down for an outfield position on the ball team, Mr. Stanton."

The scout master nodded, smiling.

"We haven't a gymnasium or a running track be-

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cause you can't build or give the patrol either one, and I can't, and he can't." Judge was pointing vaguely toward the scouts in the vacant lot, but Mr. Stanton understood. "If we'd all pull together, we could build both. A cinder track's no great trick to lay out, and some scouts over in Pennsylvania have built themselves a dandy log cabin, big enough for club-house and gymnasium and everything else."

"I believe you're right, Judge."

"I know I am, sir. And we can help each other in the patrol more than we have been doing. Bi's an expert at making fires; he can teach Bunny and the other bunglers, who usually burn their fingers without starting anything blazing. But Bunny knows more baseball in a minute than most of the fellows would in a cat's nine lifetimes; he can explain the 'inside stuff' to them. Then there's S. S., with his first aid stunts; and Handy, with his tools and his campcraft; and Roundy, with about forty-'leven strokes in swimming; and Nap, with all sorts of ideas about patriotism and citizenship; and so on. Well, just let each fellow teach some other fellow the thing he knows best, and let those two teach a third, and those three — Understand? How long would it be before the Black Eagle Patrol was as good as any in the State?"

"Not long," admitted Mr. Stanton. "You've hit

the nail on the head, Judge. We must coöperate more; we must pull together better than we have been doing. I can't win that prize next summer, and you can't, and"—the scout master smiled as he pointed generally—"he can't. But if you and he and I all get together and say—"

"Pom-pom-pullaway! Come away, or I'll fetch you away!" It was a shout from the game in the lot.—"then," he concluded, nodding over the contribution to his sentence, "then we may win."

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN THE ALLEY

After leaving Specs, Bunny walked slowly toward the street lamp in the middle of the block, which marked the entrance to an alley that led past the backyard of his uncle's house. When he was tired, he usually took advantage of this short cut, and there could be no denying his weariness to-night. The Black Eagle Patrol had hiked far out into the country during the afternoon, cooked supper in the twilight, and tramped home afterwards.

As Bunny swung off the main street, somebody came running up the alley. The boy dodged quickly to one side, that the other might have a clear path, but unluckily the runner dodged in the same direction. They came together with a thud.

Both staggered back from the shock of the collision. The man — Bunny could see him distinctly as the street lamp shone full upon his face — tottered uncertainly on his heels, half-turned his head toward the alley behind him, stared sharply for a second or two

at the boy, and then shouldered his way past, all without uttering a single word. With puzzled eyes, Bunny watched him until he disappeared into the patch of darkness down the block.

There was no light in his uncle's house; the family had evidently retired for the night. Bunny climbed the fence, and, dropping softly into the yard, tiptoed to the back door. This was never locked, for burglars were practically unknown in Lakeville. As the boy swung it inward with a cautious hand, hoping he might creep up-stairs and into bed without being heard, a protesting hinge creaked loudly.

"Is that you, George?" asked his uncle's voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you answer when I spoke to you a few minutes ago?"

"Why, I — I just came in, Uncle."

"Oh! I was certain that — You are just getting home?"

"Yes, sir. You see, we were on a hike and —"

"This is the first time this evening you have been in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

There followed a moment of silence. Then Mr. Sawyer grunted as if there were something he could not understand. After a bit, though, he said "Good

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night,” and Bunny climbed wearily to his room. He felt he could sleep the clock around.

He woke to a Babel of excited voices and was astonished to discover that it was morning again — broad daylight. After he had slipped into his clothes and hurried down-stairs, he learned the cause of all the clamor. During the night, the Sawyer house had been burglarized. All of the solid silver knives and forks and spoons were gone.

“I knew I could not be mistaken,” his uncle told him grimly. “I distinctly heard the door open before you came, and I called down, supposing it was you. That’s why I asked if you hadn’t been in the house before during the evening. The noise I heard was the burglar.”

Bunny bolted his breakfast and swept into the outdoors. He felt, somehow, as if the night prowler had conferred an honor upon his uncle’s house and upon him, by selecting it as the scene of his crime. Nothing like this had ever happened to the house in which the other fellows lived.

But Specs toppled his air-castle. “Huh!” he said, after he had listened to the story with flattering attention. “Huh! Didn’t your uncle say he heard the burglar before you got home? Well, then, I don’t see anything for *you* to crow over. Of course, now, if

the man had come while you were up-stairs, and you had heard him at work —”

The other scouts quite agreed with this view of the case. But they were interested, just the same, and they grew more so because of what happened a little later.

First, a man named Jackson, who was suspected of being the burglar, was arrested and lodged in the town calaboose. At a preliminary hearing of some kind, he was held for trial. Second, the prisoner engaged as his counsel no other than Mr. Stanton, who had been such an enthusiastic scout master that people seemed to forget he was a promising young lawyer.

The members of the Black Eagle Patrol were excited enough now. For a day, they talked of nothing else; for a week, their conversations always swung around to a discussion of the case. But when a fortnight had passed, with no further progress in bringing the man to trial, they began to forget the whole thing. Other and more important matters claimed their attention; for summer was drawing to an end, and the first day of school was just around the corner.

One morning about a week before the end of the summer vacation, Bunny dropped into Mr. Stanton's office. “I haven't done my good turn to-day,” he

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confessed, "and I thought maybe you could suggest one." A scout, of course, should do at least one good turn daily.

"I'm afraid I can't," the man answered. "I — The fact is, I wish somebody had the power to do me a good turn right now."

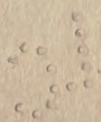
"Let me," said Bunny eagerly, "please!"

Mr. Stanton shook his head slowly. When he spoke, his voice lacked the fresh gladness it usually carried. "It's too big a problem for you — or for me, I guess. All I want is some way of defending successfully Jackson at the trial to-morrow."

"Jackson? The — the burglar?"

"The man who is accused of being a burglar," corrected the lawyer quickly. "He's innocent, Bunny; just as innocent as you and I are. They found a knife on him that your uncle owned. Jackson claims he picked it up in the street. That's all the evidence they have against him, except that he's been out of a job for a long time, but — Well, it may be enough to convict him. Bunny, do you remember the night of the burglary?"

"Of course. It was after that long hike we took out to Cottage Grove. That's how it happened I wasn't in the house when — he came. Uncle heard him."



"Yes, I know," returned Mr. Stanton. "I've talked with your uncle. He can't swear, of course, whether he heard Jackson or some other man. If somebody had only seen a stranger about town that night —"

"Why, I did," said Bunny suddenly, recalling the incident for the first time. "I bumped into a fellow who was running out of the alley into Pine Street."

"You — what?" Mr. Stanton was on his feet now, wide-eyed and staring. His cheeks were red, like a boy's, and he was breathing very fast.

"I was turning into the alley to go home the back way," explained Bunny, "and a man I never saw before came running out of the alley and bumped into me."

"Did you get a good look at him? Was it light enough to see his face?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bunny to both questions. "He was about six feet tall, with a little cap on his head, a long nose, black hair —"

"Jackson's almost as blond as an Albino," chuckled the lawyer. "I don't just know how your evidence will impress a jury, especially as we can't prove absolutely that this long-nosed man was the real burglar, but I'll make the most of it. I want to win this case, Bunny Payton, because it's the first real one

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I've had, and I need a reputation. You tell your uncle to be sure and take you over to the court-house at Dunkirk to-morrow."

So it came about that the following morning Bunny sat in the trial room at the county seat, and watched and listened while a jury was drawn, and the first witnesses in the case were examined. He had never been present at a trial before, and he found much to interest and impress him. If it were not for —

He heard his own name called. All at once he was afraid; it seemed to him he could never face this curious crowd, could never answer intelligently the questions the district attorney was sure to snap at him. But with lips pressed close together, with hands clenched, he marched steadily up the aisle, back of the jury box, and over to the witness chair. There the clerk of the court held out a Bible.

"You understand the nature of an oath, do you?" he was asked; and, when he said he did, he repeated after the clerk the solemn promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Then, after he had given his name and address, the clerk waved him to the chair.

Mr. Stanton smiled reassuringly toward him.

"Your name is Bun — that is, George Payton?" he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“And you live with your uncle, Mr. Henry Sawyer, of Lakeville?”

“Yes, sir.”

The lawyer turned to one side and made a request. Somebody rose slowly to his feet.

“George,” said Mr. Stanton, smiling a little over the unfamiliar name, “have you ever seen this man before?”

The boy looked searchingly at the person who had been pointed out. He knew instinctively that this must be Jackson, the prisoner, and a tiny fear that had been licking at his heart choked out. The man who had bumped him at the end of the alley that night was not Jackson.

“No, sir,” he said positively, “I never saw him before in all my life.”

Then Mr. Stanton, by a series of questions, made it clear to the jury that the witness had been away from his home during the early hours of the night of the burglary, that he had reached the house late, and that as he went home he had met a man running through the alley. In the course of the trial, Mr. Stanton expected to have Bunny’s uncle tell of the noise that had awakened him a few minutes before the boy came in, thus establishing circumstantial evidence, at least, that

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the man he heard down-stairs and the man Bunny met in the alley were one and the same — and not Jackson, who was being tried for the crime.

“Did you see this man in the alley distinctly?” asked Mr. Stanton.

“Yes, sir.”

“Describe him to the jury.”

So Bunny began his minute description. He told the kind of coat the man wore; the kind of tie, collar, cap. He mentioned the long nose, the scar on one cheek, the black hair, the irregular and discolored teeth. Once, as he was pausing to fix a detail in his memory, he saw the district attorney smiling queerly. This was because Jackson had a nose inclined to turn up, a smooth cheek, light hair, and very even white teeth. The district attorney thought the boy had been coached to describe somebody who looked as little like Jackson as possible, or that he was doing it unconsciously, probably because of sympathy. But Mr. Stanton knew better.

“You may have the witness, Mr. Kline,” he said, after Bunny had completed his word-picture of the man.

District Attorney Kline rose to his feet. He walked back and forth a minute before he spoke. Then, abruptly, he faced the boy.

“How long did you have to study this man in the alley?”

“A few seconds — maybe five.”

“Five seconds — or less! And you mean to tell us you remember all you have described after looking at him only that long?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Indeed!” The district attorney smiled understandingly upon the jury, quite as if further comment would be superfluous. “Ah, yes! I — I think that will be all.” And he sat down, still smiling sarcastically. Even Bunny, squirming in the witness chair, realized the man had scored heavily. But Mr. Stanton was not yet through.

“Could you remember as much after looking at anybody for a few seconds — say, some person in this court-room?”

“I think I could.”

Mr. Stanton turned toward the back of the room. In the last row, practically hidden by those in front of her, was a little girl.

“Will you ask that little girl to stand up?” he said to the court officer. “Thank you. Now, George, please study her while I count. One — two — three — four — five. Sit down, little girl. George, tell us how she looked.”

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"She has brown hair," said the boy readily. "It's combed back tight over one ear and is straggly over the other. Her ears are pretty large. Her dress is green, with a stained place in front. She has a snub nose. Her face is a little dirty. She was too far away to see her eyes, and she kept her mouth shut so I couldn't see her teeth."

Something very like a wave of applause rippled over the court-room, which was promptly stifled by the pounding of a gavel. The description had been remarkably accurate.

"Now," encouraged Mr. Stanton, "tell the jury just how you manage to note all the details so quickly."

"I trained myself to do it," the boy explained. "I am a Boy Scout, Number 8 of the Black Eagle Patrol, over in Lakeville. I learned to observe closely from playing 'Kim's Game' and 'Morgan's Game' and 'Shop Window.' In Shop Window we go past five or six stores in town, stopping a few seconds to study the windows of each, and then we write out what we saw in any one the umpire picks out — say, the third, or the fifth." He paused to smile reminiscently at Mr. Stanton. "The first time I played the game," he confessed, "I couldn't remember whether the third window was Grogan's hardware store or Sherer's meat market. For a long time I was the worst in the whole

patrol. But it made me mad to be licked by everybody else, and I began practicing alone all the time, on windows, and the things on desks and tables, and people. And — well, I do it pretty well now.”

He said this last weakly, but the jury sensed something of the stubborn and almost interminable struggle that had preceded his mastery of the art.

Mr. Stanton placed a newspaper over the long table before which he was standing. Taking from his pocket a number of articles, he slipped them under it. Then, after calling the witness’ attention, he whisked off the paper, allowing the boy to see what lay under it for only a second or two, when he promptly covered the articles again.

“Tell us,” he said, “what you saw on the table.”

Bunny enumerated seven things, ranging from a coin to a bunch of keys. So far as the jury was concerned, the test was wholly successful. But the district attorney declined to give up without further proof. When Mr. Stanton again turned the witness over to him, the prosecutor asked: —

“You are quite sure you never saw that little girl before to-day?”

“I don’t remember her.”

“Humph! Suppose we try another test. Let me see.” He scanned the court-room with keen eyes.

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"There! Will the gentleman in the third row from the back, last seat, kindly stand up."

Nobody stirred.

"I mean the man who is hunched down in his seat. Officer, ask him to stand up."

The court officer touched the man on the shoulder. Still there was no response. It was not until the man had been jerked sharply that he slouched to a standing posture.

"Now, witness, look at that person while I count five. Ready? One —"

Bunny fixed his eyes on the man, checking off the points in his mind. The fellow had black hair and —

"— two —"

— a long nose —

"— three —"

— and a scar on one cheek —

"— four —"

— and irregular and discolored teeth.

"— five! Sit down, my good man. Now, boy, describe him."

"I did once to-day," said Bunny. His voice was high-pitched and shrill. "I did. He — he's the man who bumped into me in the alley the night uncle's house was robbed."

Just what happened next, Bunny never knew clearly.

There was a commotion of some kind in the back of the room, a brief scuffle, a shout or two, and then a long silence, broken only by hurried whispers between the lawyers and the judge. Finally, somebody seemed to remember the boy who had been testifying, and an attendant led him from the witness chair, whispering that court stood adjourned till one o'clock that afternoon.

He ate dinner at the hotel with his uncle, who refused to discuss the case in any way. Two or three other diners nodded to the boy, and pointed him out to friends. And then, at one o'clock, he was back in the court-room once more.

He did not fully understand the legal proceedings that followed. Afterward, though, Mr. Stanton explained to him that the man he had pointed out in court as the one who ran into him the night of the crime was really the guilty burglar, and had confessed during the noon hour; and that his client, Jackson, had thus been freed by due process of law.

So it seemed everybody was glad he had learned enough scoutcraft to be useful, except possibly the criminal now under lock and key. His uncle put an arm around his shoulders and said he gave promise of being a "chip of the old block," whatever that meant; and Jackson wrung his hand, and thanked

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him, and promised to stick faithfully to a job that had been promised and thus escape the suspicion under which people with no visible means of support are liable to fall; and the district attorney actually apologized, exactly like any ordinary mortal, for having doubted him, and said he wanted his boy to see about getting up a patrol of Boy Scouts in Dunkirk; and Mr. Stanton — well, Scout Master Stanton just looked at him, with a twinkle in his eyes, and remarked happily:

“Remember what you dropped into my office to see me about yesterday, Bunny? Well, you have done your good turn to-day.”

CHAPTER X

KNOTS IN THE NECKTIES

It was about this time that the knot-in-the-necktie habit struck the Black Eagle Patrol. Judge introduced it, and when Specs questioned him about it, explained: "It's a regular scout way of remembering you haven't done your good turn yet. After you've done your daily good turn, you can untie the knot."

Within a week, the entire patrol was diligently knotting its ties each morning, with the single exception of S. S. His spick and span nature forbade the rumpiling of his precious neckwear; so each morning he avoided it by the very simple kindness of gathering chips for the cook before he donned his tie.

The most noticeable result of the habit was that, for the first time, every member began to obey the law to the letter. No longer were there exceptions that proved the rule. Without fail, each boy did his good turn before going to bed.

There was more of this good turn thing than the scouts imagined. As Mr. Stanton pointed out, you

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couldn't very well be conscientious about doing a good turn without being also trustworthy and loyal and helpful and friendly and kind — and all the other things that scouts were supposed to be.

Specs was genuinely grieved when he told Bunny of his failure to live up to the law the day before.

“You see,” he said, “we had company for supper, and I couldn't get away till they were gone. Then, just when I was starting out to find something to do, I happened to sneeze, and my mother thought I was catching cold and put me straight to bed. She wouldn't even let me out of the house for fifteen minutes,” he added gloomily.

Bunny meditated. “Why don't you get your good turn done earlier in the morning?” he asked finally. “Why do you always wait around till the very last minute?”

Specs became silent. His face assumed an air of deep mystery.

“Why?” Bunny urged.

“That's for me to know and you to find out,” grinned Specs; and the last bell, which sent all stragglers rushing into the schoolhouse, forbade further questions.

“I wonder what Specs is up to,” Bunny confided to Handy at recess. “Every noon he runs home and

finishes dinner as soon as he can, and then you don't see him again till the bell rings. I'm sure it has something to do with his good turn."

"Why don't you follow him?"

Bunny hesitated. "Would that be quite square to Specs?"

"He told you to find out, didn't he?" laughed Handy.

Sure enough, not only Specs' words, but his very tone had been a challenge; and Bunny, after a little thought, made up his mind that it would be altogether fair and aboveboard to investigate.

That noon, therefore, he devoured his own dinner in such haste that his aunt and uncle wondered. Then he ran at top speed to the band-stand in the little park, arriving there only in time to hide before Specs appeared.

The latter's necktie was still knotted in a large, untidy bunch. He walked slowly, as if looking for somebody who might pop out at any moment. Bunny watched curiously as he climbed the little flight of steps leading to the Merchants' National Bank and peeked in through the glass doors. Evidently he was disappointed, for he turned down Wood Street to the public library. Bunny now emerged from the shadow of the band-stand, and, hiding himself behind a

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friendly telephone pole, saw Specs repeat his performance. This time he opened the door and walked into the library, emerging a little later with a set scowl.

Something queer was on tap, and Bunny could not make it out. Following at a little distance, he observed Specs dart into the postoffice and out again, thence walking hurriedly down Maple Avenue to Wilcox Street. Bunny trailed as closely as he dared, now hiding behind shade trees and now accepting the shelter of the corner of a house.

Specs seemed to know exactly where he was going. Without hesitation, he walked past the corner of Oak and Wilcox and on to the middle of the next block. There he stopped in front of the residence of Mr. Albertson. Bunny watched him parade slowly up and down the sidewalk, his hand occasionally touching the iron fence. At last, as though tired of this sentry duty, he leaned on the gate.

While Bunny stared, thoroughly puzzled as to the meaning of this strange behavior, the door of the house opened, and the red-faced cook appeared.

"Boy," she called out in a sharp voice, "you get off that gate. Mr. Albertson told you to go away once already. You're up to some mischief or other. You scoot!"

At this, Specs slowly took his elbows from the gate,

and, with head sunk and whistling gloomily, started back up the street. Bunny darted from behind a hedge to meet him.

“Were you doing the cook back there a good turn by getting off the gate?” Bunny asked.

For a long moment Specs frowned, but under the necessity of the scout law to be cheerful, he managed a smile.

“Never you mind,” he said. “I know what I’m doing; and it’s not as foolish as you might think. I’ll tell you all about it at the meeting to-night.”

Nor could any other member of the patrol get a word out of him until they gathered that evening in Mr. Stanton’s law offices, which was their regular meeting place. Even then, it was not until the routine business had been disposed of that Specs took the floor.

“I think,” he began confidently, “that we waste a lot of energy in this good turn business. It strikes me we ought to try to do good turns to people who can appreciate them.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Stanton.

“Well!” Specs turned to the scout master a little embarrassed. “I mean this. Why not do good turns for people who can do good turns for us? We all know we would like regular uniforms for our hikes,

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at least. Now, if one of us could do a good turn for somebody able to buy them for us —”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Mr. Stanton. “Don’t you know that a scout isn’t allowed to receive anything for the good turns he does?”

Specs nodded. “I know that, of course. But if somebody gets interested in the patrol because of a good turn one of the fellows does him, there isn’t anything in the laws to keep him from giving the patrol a present.” He looked around triumphantly. “Well, that’s what I’ve been trying to do. Mr. Albertson used to be a contractor over in Elkana. He’s got a lot of money. Now, I’m just waiting for a chance to do him a good turn, and when —”

A roar of laughter stopped him. He flushed angrily as he faced his fellow scouts. “All right! All right! Laugh your heads off. But you just wait and see.”

There was no arguing Specs from his position. He went home that night as convinced as ever that he was working along the right lines. Nor did his failure the next day, nor the next, in any way discourage him. For a week, moreover, he spent his spare time lurking in spots where he felt he might expect to be in a position to help the retired contractor, provided, of course, Mr. Albertson showed any signs of needing help. But

it was not till a fortnight after the meeting that the opportunity came his way, and then things turned out as no one could have foreseen.

All Thursday and Friday morning had been so full of rain that at noon Friday a feeble sun was doing very little toward drying up the mud puddles. As usual, Specs had hurried through his dinner and begun his search for the rich man, without any particular idea that he would really see him, when he blundered full upon Mr. Albertson. The latter, limping from his rheumatism, had a cane in each hand. It was the chance that had crowned Specs' every dream.

Quite without thought of his own clothes, he splashed through the mire to the edge of the curbing where Mr. Albertson stood, apparently in doubt as to attempting the trip across the street.

Specs touched his cap politely. "Shall I help you across, sir?"

The man frowned upon him. It was a frown to chill the stoutest heart.

"I — I'm a Boy Scout," Specs faltered, not knowing what to make of this reception, "and every Boy Scout has to do a good turn every day, and I — I thought —"

"Well, you thought wrong," snapped Mr. Albertson as a twinge of rheumatism ran up his leg like a

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knife. "I'm able to get across the street without help. Go away!"

It was a piece of unmerited and unnecessary rudeness, for which the man was sorry a moment afterward. But it crushed Specs utterly. He could not even think of a retort, much less utter one. Thoroughly humiliated, he turned away, his one impulse being to get out of sight somewhere.

But just as he wheeled about, the appearance of a little old lady, poorly dressed and carrying a heavy, covered basket, brought him back to his better self.

"Let me help you with the basket," he said.

"I wish you would." The little old lady smiled at him gratefully. "I'm only going a couple of blocks farther."

Basket on his arm, Specs started across the street, with its owner following close behind. Mr. Albertson was still hesitating. But Specs had covered only half the distance to the opposite side of the road when an unexpected turn of affairs upset his plans.

As he turned around to see if he could assist the little old lady with his arm, he was surprised and delighted to discover Mr. Albertson standing helpless in a most difficult position. He had started to cross the street alone, and was now some ten feet from the sidewalk, in the middle of a muddy sea, with one of his

canes floating in a puddle. There he stood, unable to go forward or back, and equally unable to pick up the fallen cane.

"I'll get it for you, sir," shouted Specs; and, quite forgetting that you can do only one thing at a time, he set down the basket in the middle of the crossing and started toward Mr. Albertson.

It was an unlucky move. He had barely put his hands on the fallen cane when a scream from the little old lady warned him that he had made a mistake.

Tearing around the corner burst a butcher's delivery wagon — driverless. The horse was splashing and galloping as if he were hauling a fire engine to an extra dangerous fire. But he did not run into the little old lady, as Specs feared for one breathless moment he might. And it was not till the wagon careened on down the street that the scout noticed the wheels had run over the basket, leaving it a mesh of splinters.

Biting his lower lip, Specs stood like a statue, listening to outbursts from both Mr. Albertson and the little old lady, and watching the yellow and white mixture that trickled from the shattered basket into the mud. Eggs! The basket had been filled with eggs! Now it was filled with scraps of shell and sticky yolks.

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"And they were all fresh eggs," moaned the little old lady; "all fresh."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Albertson, with a vigor which did not seem possible, "all fresh eggs, and she was bringing them to my house — to *me!*" He took the cane Specs offered him and waved it angrily in the air.

"But, sir, I —"

The man did not hear him. "Never mind, Mrs. Hofstetter," he said. "I won't have these young rascals playing us tricks while I have anything to say about it. I'll make him pay for every single egg that is broken. Yes, and for the basket, too," he finished fiercely. "Boy, what's your name?"

Two weeks it took Specs to pay for the four and one half dozen eggs. He hurried through his dinner, just as he had done before the accident, but now only because he had entered into an arrangement with his father to earn the egg money by sawing the family wood. And as the old saw moved slowly back and forth, Specs began to see things more clearly. It grew plain to him why he had been breaking the spirit of the scout law in his attempts to help only those who might help the patrol. He saw, not only that it did not pay, but that in doing such a thing, he missed all the pleasure that came from a simple and courteous service, rendered wherever needed, with no thought of

reward. In fact, it was a chastened and vastly improved Specs who attended a special meeting of the patrol some ten days after the egg catastrophe.

"I've called you together," said Mr. Stanton, "because of a letter which I received this afternoon. It's from one of the richest men of Elkana. He says he was in Lakeville a month ago, and wanted to find the library. He asked a boy the way, and the boy, instead of merely giving directions, walked with him till he was within sight of the building. Although his guide did not tell him, the man learned that he was a Boy Scout. He writes that he was so pleased with the chap's modesty and unaffected courtesy that he wants to give the patrol twenty dollars, to spend as we see fit."

The patrol gave three noisy cheers.

"Of course," Mr. Stanton continued, "I shall write to him that we do not expect presents for good turns, but that, if his gift is simply for the good of the cause, there is no reason why we cannot accept it. By the way, he said the boy who helped him wore spectacles."

Specs wriggled uncomfortably as the others turned to him, and Bi thumped him heartily on the back.

"I remember the day," Specs said, "only I never thought he was rich. His clothes were old. I supposed he was just a poor old fellow and — Say!" He became suddenly excited. "Why, I never thought

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that was a good turn at all; it was the day I felt so bad because I thought I hadn't done any good turn. You remember my telling you, Bunny."

It was voted to accept the present. Eight scout uniforms could be purchased for twenty dollars. After the meeting had adjourned, Specs hung around for a final word with Mr. Stanton.

"You know," he said earnestly, "I'm glad I helped that fellow out, but — it's funny — but I wish he hadn't given us any money for it."

Mr. Stanton patted the boy's shoulder.

"Specs," he said, "you've learned the scout idea at last."

CHAPTER XI

FRESH FISH

Bunny sat waiting in the kitchen, a blue-checkered apron tied tightly under his arms. He looked at the clock, at the stove, and at the door. Then he shook his head impatiently. Roundy had promised to come promptly at four, and here it was a quarter past four already. If he delayed too long, Mrs. Sawyer would claim the kitchen as her own and begin to prepare supper.

Testing with a spoon the yellowish mixture that filled a bowl on the table, Bunny decided the batter was too weak. He was just adding a little more of the self-raising flour when the back door opened, revealing Roundy on the threshold.

"It isn't my fault, Bunny," he began defensively. "I told her that you didn't want an audience, but she said she'd come anyhow, so —"

"So here I am," finished Molly Sefton, stepping boldly into the kitchen. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

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Father wants me to stay here with the Weltons for a month or two. Isn't that fine? Go on and cook now. Roundy told me all about you."

"What did you tell her?" demanded Bunny, while something inside him suggested that he had better hang on to his temper with both hands.

Roundy squirmed and looked down at the floor. "Well, I told her that you had qualified to become a second-class scout, according to Mr. Stanton, in everything but cooking and —"

"Go on," said Bunny sternly.

"Well, and I told her I didn't think you'd ever be a second-class scout, that's all," Roundy finished.

Bunny set his teeth. "I'm going to be a second-class scout in a day or two," he said, "and then I'm going right along and be a first-class scout. I'm learning to cook for both tests. And I'm going to show you this afternoon that I can make griddle-cakes." He walked over to the stove and lifted one of the lids to see how the fire was coming on.

"Can you build a fire in the stove yet, Bunny?" Roundy winked at Molly. It was a standing joke in the patrol that when Bunny had joined them, he was not able to accomplish this simple feat of fire-making. "I'll tell you what to do, Bunny, if you ever get lost in the woods and want a fire in a hurry, just bore a

hole in a kerosene tree and pour the juice on some lighted sticks. Great!"

It was with difficulty that Bunny retained his temper. Molly had begun to giggle, and he hated to have girls — especially girls he thought he might learn to like — laugh at him. Besides, in accordance with the new help-each-other policy of the patrol, Bi had taught him as much about fire-making as he knew himself; Roundy was here now to teach him the fine points of cooking.

"All right," he said, forcing a smile, "you people laugh all you want to. But if you don't behave, I'll eat up all the griddle-cakes I make, without offering you a single one."

"You'll have to give me ten cents a cake if you expect me to eat 'em," retorted Roundy.

This made Bunny forget himself to such an extent that he straightway slapped the griddle on the stove, and, without greasing it or waiting for it to heat, covered it with a generous coating of the yellow batter.

Roundy hugged himself with glee. Molly, after shoving the amateur cook out of the way, scraped the griddle clean, heated it, and gave it a coat of bacon grease. Then she thickened the batter and produced griddle-cakes of such lusciousness that Roundy declared he could eat them all night.

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Bunny watched proceedings in gloomy silence. He did not even try his skill again, and he had no answer to Molly's taunt that she knew quite as much about woodcraft as he did and a great deal more about cooking. As a matter of fact, he found it hard work to hide his low spirits under an assumed cheerfulness.

The matter of cooking had begun to worry him so seriously, however, that he determined to take his trouble to the scout master himself. Roundy could help if Molly Sefton stayed away, but Molly promised to come for the next exhibition.

"I don't see why you are so discouraged," said Mr. Stanton in some surprise. "You don't expect to be able to do everything all at once, do you?"

"It's not that," Bunny said. "But I'm not doing this cooking business any better than when I started. I can bake potatoes, of course, but I can't seem to get the hang of meats and the like. I can't even cook things on a regular stove, to say nothing of doing it in the open, without the ordinary kitchen utensils. Every time I try, something happens."

"But you are learning all the time."

"How can I be learning," Bunny demanded, "if I'm not improving a bit?"

Mr. Stanton rose and looked squarely into the boy's eyes. "Bunny, there's an old saying that we learn

to swim in winter and to skate in summer. That means that every time you try to do something — try hard — it has its effect on your brain cells. A fellow may try hard to swim all one summer, without seeming to go ahead a bit, but the next summer he'll find himself a hundred per cent. better. His trying has helped him. You mustn't be impatient. You're learning, even though you don't think so. Keep on trying, and in the end you'll not only be able to pass the cooking tests, but you'll be a really good cook."

It was not hard to believe what the scout master said, but it was hard to put it into practice. Though apt at some things, Bunny had found that cooking, for some reason, was an almost insurmountable barrier. As he had told the scout master, something always happened. The thing he cooked was burned or underdone, without salt or with too much salt, too tough or falling to pieces — never just right.

But Mr. Stanton had impressed upon him that patient effort is bound to produce results. So day after day he tried his hand at cooking, although day after day he failed. The rest of the patrol scoffed good-naturedly; even Molly Sefton could not keep from poking fun at him. But still he practised.

One Saturday about this time, a fishing excursion with Roundy and Specs fell through, and Bunny

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tramped off by himself, lunch-box slung on one side, his uncle's creel on the other. From the angling standpoint, the day proved most profitable. He whipped up a trout stream on the other side of Bald Hill and from there crossed a patch of woods and a valley to a part of the country that was new to him. A bird with a strange coloring caught his eye, and he followed its tangled course through a second woods and out into a tiny clearing.

So intent had he been upon the bird that not till it finally soared out of sight did he realize, not only that he had strayed far from his original path, but that he had no idea of the direction of this trail. He was in a section of hilly woodland, which, except for the size of the trees, might have been the "forest primeval." It was trackless and appalling. Nor were the streams a guide to civilization; for he knew that, instead of flowing into the lake, they made their way, by long and devious routes, to the Big Indian River, more than ten miles distant.

He was lost. The knowledge brought him fear and fogged his brain. In a general way, he knew he was north of the village; if he traveled due south, he ought to run plump into it. But how was he to travel due south? By the time he had wound through a ravine and climbed a couple of irregular hills, he

would be likely to find himself headed for the North Star.

He was seized with an unreasonable panic. He wanted to throw down his fishing tackle and run madly — anywhere. He did start on a fast walk toward what he felt was the south.

There is no explaining the terror of the person who is lost for the first time. Part of Bunny's mind seemed to have taken fright, and galloped off and left him. A doubt gripped him. If you faced the east, was the south on your right hand or your left? He realized that this was a question so simple as to be ridiculous, yet for the life of him he could not answer. Right hand or left — he did not know. He was as completely lost as any explorer in the heart of Africa.

To crown his dismay, a sudden crackling in the brush, as if some large animal were coming toward him, made his heart jump and then beat furiously. The thing, whatever it was, crashed nearer and nearer. For a moment, Bunny was tempted to drop everything and make for the nearest tree. Then, with an effort, he controlled himself and stood his ground, right fist doubling almost without his knowledge.

The crackle of the breaking brush grew louder. It came from the ridge of the little hill in front of him, and he waited for the animal to appear from among

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the trees. He could glimpse it now. Then he gasped with relief. The thing he had feared was Mollie Sef-ton, hatless, pale of face, her dress torn by the briars.

When she saw Bunny, she uttered a cry of relief and ran toward him. Her face was tear-stained; plainly enough, she was trying hard not to break down.

"Oh, Bunny, I'm so glad I've found you. I've been lost all day. They think I am at the Albertsons', but I went out to pick some flowers in the woods, and I've been wandering for hours and hours."

Bunny was striving desperately to think up a reply that would be truthful and not too discouraging. But she seemed to be aware of his perplexity. Her face showed a sudden terror.

"Don't you know where we are?" she gasped. "Don't you know yourself?"

"I'll find out," he answered recklessly. "We can't be far from the road. You just come along with me, Molly."

He started up the ravine. For a dozen steps she followed; then, with a quick sob, she dropped down on the moss-covered bank.

"I — I can't go any farther," she wept. "I'm all tired, and I — I'm lost — and I can't go any farther. I won't!"

To Bunny's already difficult position a fresh anx-

iety was added. No longer was he responsible for one, but for two. He touched her gently on the shoulder.

"If you'll stop crying," he said, "we can talk it over and maybe plan something to do."

"I can't plan," she wailed. "I'm tired, and I'm lost. We're both lost, and — and we'll starve to death before they find us. I won't go another step. Do you hear me, Bunny Payton? Not another step."

A sudden idea came to the boy. Without a word, he dropped his fishing pole and unslung the creel and lunch-box. He peered into the latter and smiled. The salt which remained after savoring his hard-boiled eggs had been saved; that was a habit of thrift scoutcraft had taught him. It was wrapped in a little cornucopia of paper, and there was quite enough of it for his purposes.

In the very middle of the ravine lay a big tree trunk. At an acute angle with this, he piled a wall of stones. Then he skirmished the woods for dry twigs, and, with the aid of his knife, manufactured a litter of shavings. Next, with a single match, he started the fire.

While it was blazing and catching the larger pieces of wood, he opened the creel and began to clean and dress his trout. All this time a strange feeling possessed him. He felt as he had felt once before when

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he had practised valiantly to overcome the difficult chords in a piece of piano music. One day, to his surprise, he had found himself suddenly able to play them easily. This feeling held him now. Without any outward reason for the belief, he knew he could cook.

The fire caught splendidly. It was neither too hot nor too cold; it was just right. Bi had labored long with him before the knowledge became second nature, but now he knew just what sort of pieces to place on the fire and just how to place them. He did this, apparently, by instinct. Yet he knew it was not that at all, but the result of long, patient work — of hard trying.

Mollie was watching him now. She had wiped away her tears and did not look half so downcast. "You c-can't cook," she said, with a catch in her voice.

"Wait! You'll see!" retorted the triumphant Bunny. "I'm going to give you the best meal you ever ate in your life. You're hungry — that's all that's the matter with you; and when you've had a couple of bites of these trout, you'll feel so good you'll want to jump up and down and yell."

He was glad to note that she answered this remark with a smile; not much of a one, to be sure, but still a smile.

At one end, the ravine sloped into a little pool, fringed with willows. Bunny cut half a dozen of the green shoots and split each down the middle. Wedging the cleaned trout in these rods, he placed them, like spits, across the fire. One end of each rod rested on the log, the other on the stones. In the middle, over the fire, was the trout. As he busied himself with these preparations, once more he became aware of the fact that he knew how. His efforts in learning to cook had not been wasted, however vain they had seemed at the time. As a result of these patient trials, an impression had been left. Now, suddenly, he found himself able to do the task. The "suddenly," of course, was all on the surface; the change underneath had been going on all the time.

Molly laughed at him. She had command of herself again. "Those won't be fit to eat," she said.

"You wait!" Bunny nodded his head knowingly. "After you've tried these, you'll want me to cook all the rest for you."

Skilfully he turned the broiling morsels over the fire, that each might be done to a turn. By his side, Molly watched with growing admiration.

When the first fish was cooked to an appetizing brown, he handed it to her on a scrap of birch-bark. She allowed it to cool for a little time; then, seasoning

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it with the salt, took an experimental bite. Bunny watched her from the corner of his eye.

“Oh, great!” she cried enthusiastically. “I never in my life tasted anything half so good.”

Bunny beamed. Molly ate the little fish hungrily and started on a second. The cook—a real cook now—prepared more on the spit.

A half hour later, rested and fed, the two “babes in the woods” were looking at things from a wholly different viewpoint.

“We’re not lost,” Bunny said confidently. “Lakeville is south, and everybody knows that if you face the east, the south is on your right hand. I’ll bet you I can see the spire on the Methodist Church from that hill yonder. If I can, it will be easy to find some other point nearer, on a line between it and us. Then we’ll make for that until it’s time to take another observation.”

The hill revealed nothing. But Bunny was his sane self now, and he climbed its tallest tree. From its topmost branches, he saw a brown, winding road less than half a mile from them. This they gained without any extraordinary difficulty; and, just as the clocks were striking six, a tired girl and an equally tired boy plodded into the village.

“I’m sorry,” said Molly as she left him, “that I ever

laughed at your cooking. You're as good a cook as I am, and you're a lot better in the woods than I'd ever be, Bunny Payton."

On his way home, Bunny stopped once. It was at the Magoons. He called Roundy to the door and said enigmatically: "I've learned to cook." Then, refusing to answer any questions, he hurried on toward his uncle's house, chuckling.

At the next regular meeting of the Black Eagle Patrol, Bunny was made a second-class scout.

CHAPTER XII

THE NINTH BOY

The idea came to Nap one night in midwinter, while he was undressing. It was such a fine idea (or so he thought) that he felt compelled to let out a wild whoop, which brought his alarmed mother to the foot of the stairs. Just the same, it was an idea good enough to warrant the yell — no doubt about it!

The next morning, instead of loitering on the way to school to exchange a volley of snowballs with any fellow ready to give battle, he sought out Specs and told him the plan. Specs whooped. So did S. S. and Roundy. Convinced that he was about to solve a problem that had been bothering the Black Eagle Patrol for many weeks, Nap buttonholed Bunny at recess.

“Started your composition yet?” he demanded.

“Yes, last night I —”

“Young Anvers started his?”

“How should I know? Why?”

“Here’s the idea,” Nap explained, looking about to make sure there were no eavesdroppers. “If we’re

to compete in that tournament next summer, we'll have to enter a baseball team. That means we must get somebody to train as a tenderfoot, so we can have a ninth player. Well, you know yourself that young Anvers is about our only chance."

"That's right," agreed Bunny.

"And you know we've fallen down hard in our schemes to get him interested."

"Yes."

"And you know he wants to win that prize of a book offered by teacher for the best composition."

"Of course. As far as that goes, I do, too. But I don't see what you're driving at."

"Just this," said Nap proudly. "We've tried to get him for our baseball team in the spring by being nice to him. Now we're going to make him a fair offer. It's strategy, like Napoleon used to make up. I'll go to Anvers. 'Look here,' I'll say; 'you want to beat out Bunny in that contest, don't you? You do? All right. You agree to let us train you for a tenderfoot in the Black Eagle Patrol, and we'll agree to let you win that prize.' 'How can you do that?' he'll ask. And I'll tell him: 'Well, Bunny may lose the composition he's writing, or get all mixed up in his dates and names, or — or something.' Then he —"

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The school bell marked the end of the recess period. Before Bunny could open his mouth, Nap said: "See you at noon," and raced up the steps.

The announcement of the contest had been made by Miss Pedder, their teacher, on the preceding day. As a matter of fact, it was the outcome of a similar competition held the week before, in which Bunny and Sanford Anvers had been declared joint winners. To break the existing tie between them, the two boys were each asked to prepare a new essay by the following Friday on the subject "George Washington in the Revolution." The prize was a handsome book.

Not until Bunny took his seat in the schoolroom did the full significance of Nap's proposal become clear. He had suggested, almost in so many words, that Sanford Anvers be allowed to win the prize without opposition. Nap could not possibly know, of course, how much Bunny wanted it himself. Already he had put aside the three American histories he found in his uncle's library, and marked the rather short biography in the Encyclopedia Britannica, and talked with Jeb Patton, who claimed to have known a man whose grandfather was very well acquainted with George Washington.

The more Bunny thought about what Nap had said, the more indignant he became. They wanted

young Anvers, of course, but not at that price. Losing to him by unfair means would be just as much cheating as winning from him by unfair means. It meant a violation of the first scout law, which Bunny thought he had mastered by this time. So he wrote on his slate, "Can't do it!" and held it up for the other to see.

Nap chanced to be looking in another direction. The message escaped him altogether. Not so with Miss Pedder, however. She looked from the slate to Bunny with cold, disapproving eyes, and said: "You may remain at noon after the other pupils go."

When he left the schoolhouse at ten minutes past twelve, still withering under the teacher's expressed scorn of one who was not trustworthy, Bunny saw nothing of Nap. Vaguely troubled, he went home to dinner. At twenty minutes to one, on the way back, he found the trouble-maker blocking his path.

Nap was sputtering with rage. It seemed he had gone to young Anvers with his scheme as soon as school was dismissed at noon. The boy had listened without comment until Nap was quite through; then he had said bluntly: "No, thanks! I'm not worrying about any scout's beating me at anything. Anyhow, I can write a better composition than Payton any day in the week."

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"He can't, though, can he?" asked Nap anxiously. "I told him he couldn't, but he says if he can't —"

"Well?"

"—he'll be willing to let us go ahead and train him for the patrol, and play ball with us, and join as a tenderfoot some day, and — Beat him, Bunny! Beat him! You've got to do it! If any of us can help you with that composition —"

"That wouldn't be fair. But you just watch me snake Mister Anvers into the fold! You just watch, Nap!"

If he had been eager to win the contest before, he was doubly so now. He had wanted the honor, of course, and the book, but he wanted much more to do something for the Black Eagle Patrol. If this ninth boy could once be interested in scouting, Bunny had no doubt of his ultimate enthusiasm.

This was Tuesday. He worked on the composition that night until his aunt sent him up-stairs to bed. On Wednesday Nap took him to one side.

"He's cheating, Bunny. His father helps him write."

"How do you know?"

"Well, our cook's sister works for the Anvers'. She says San and his father do all his lessons together. I'm going to tell teacher."

"But you're not sure about his father's helping him write," objected Bunny. "Maybe it isn't so. Besides, you don't want to be a tattle-tale, do you?"

"I want you to win," said Nap grimly. "It's just a question of fair play, that's all. And —"

There was one sure way of swaying the other. "Nap," Bunny said earnestly, "this is my fight. I am the one who must write the composition, win or lose. I am the general in the campaign. And I ask you, as a soldier in my army, to do as I say."

Nap's heels clicked together with military precision. His shoulders went back, his chest forward. "I will," he said.

"Then don't tell Miss Pedder — don't tell anybody — this suspicion about young Anvers. Do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise, but I don't understand."

"It's because I have faith in young Anvers," explained Bunny; "I think he's square. That's one reason. The other is that by keeping you from telling, I do him a good turn. Besides, even his father may not be able to patch up his composition into anything very good."

But even this sop of comfort was wiped away before the day grew much older. That noon he met Molly Sefton on the street.

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"Bunny," she said, "I wish you'd invite me over to your house and cook me something good to eat. Dad came down from Elkana yesterday, and he and I are spending the day at the Anvers'. They have a French chef, you know. Ah, ze deeshes he meex — br-r-r-r! I like the scout ways best. Between eating what that chef turns out and listening to Sanford read me his essay on George Washington, I am nearly —"

"Is it a g-good essay?" interrupted Bunny. There was a slight catch in his voice.

Molly considered. "Yes," she admitted, "it is. It's better than I supposed anybody but an editor could write. What makes you ask?"

"I just wondered. I — Good-by, Molly."

Molly Sefton stared frowningly after him as he strode down the street. "Well, now," she puzzled, "I wonder!"

In school that afternoon, Bunny tried honestly to study. But it was desperately hard to keep his mind on his work. Time after time, when some sudden noise roused him from his dreaming, he found himself staring straight at the printed page of a text-book without seeing it at all. Yes, he had done his daily good turn, but at what sacrifice? A word from him, too, would relieve Nap from his promise not to tell.

When four o'clock came, he turned resolutely toward home. The lake had frozen in the last week, and the skating was excellent. Several of the scouts headed that way, but Bunny shook his head. He must work on his composition. But he couldn't. The spelling of words eluded him; dates and names jumbled hopelessly; sentences wouldn't come at his beck.

It was no use. He threw down his pencil in disgust. Perhaps an hour on the ice would clear his head.

Shallow Creek empties into the lake at an angle of about forty-five degrees. On the triangular spit of land between the shores, Bunny squatted down to put on his skates. As he was slipping the buckle tongue into the hole of the strap, he heard a scraping sound from up the creek. He turned quickly.

Coming toward him, pushed by somebody behind it, was an ice-boat. It was built of heavy scantlings, and was perhaps twenty-five feet in length. At the point where the mast was stepped, a cross-beam jutted out, with an iron-shod runner at either end. The third runner was at the stern of the main plank, and acted as a rudder. Just forward of the tiller was a shallow cockpit.

The boat slid out upon the frozen lake. Not till then did Bunny notice who was pushing it along. It was Sanford Anvers.

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“Want to take a spin with me, Payton?” he asked suddenly.

Afterwards, when he thought it over, Bunny couldn't recall whether or not he answered at all; but he did know that he skated forward with one powerful right-leg thrust, and that he scrambled aboard the ice-boat, and that young Anvers laughed a little, and pushed off.

As the streaky wind filled the sail, the craft leaped ahead in a series of spasmodic lurches. Faster and faster it skimmed along, until the forward runners shot back a spray of fine ice-dust into the faces of the two in the cockpit. Then it heeled suddenly, with the windward runner lifting clear of the surface, and for a distance of perhaps fifty feet they ran on two, as an automobile sometimes takes a sharp curve on the inner wheels alone. The sensation was wholly new to Bunny, and not altogether pleasant.

Presently, though, they swung out from the shore and ran before the wind, toward the middle of the lake, where there were still jagged patches of open water. The ice was smoother here, however, and many skaters were darting to and fro. Bunny waved a hand to Molly Sefton as they shot past her.

What happened next, the boy never knew clearly. Probably young Anvers jammed over the tiller to jibe

without warning him. At any rate, the boat veered from its course so abruptly and so unexpectedly that Bunny was literally catapulted from his seat and slung spinning over the glassy ice, almost at a right angle to the new tack the ice-boat was now sailing. And a moment later, as he lost his momentum, there sounded an ominous crack beneath him. The ice gave way, allowing his legs to sink into the freezing water, but holding firmly enough to support the balance of his body. Profiting by his scout training, he ceased to struggle, lying perfectly still.

It was only a minute or two before Bi and Nap reached him, picking their way through the honeycomb of treacherous ice; and it was only a second or two after that before they lifted him clear of the hole and began skating him vigorously toward the shore, to start anew the circulation in his numbed legs. Once there, Bi whipped off his skates, and the journey became an overland march to the Sawyer home.

“Wasn’t that young Anvers on the ice-boat?” asked Nap abruptly.

Bunny nodded.

“It looked to me,” ventured Nap, “as if he purposely snapped you off to the ice.”

“I don’t think so. He—he isn’t that kind of a fellow.”

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“Isn’t he? Well, I — Look here, won’t you release me from that promise I made you this morning?”

All day Bunny had been wondering if he would not; all day he had been sure he was making a mistake; all day he had promised himself to give the word to Nap. Now the time had come. But to his own surprise, he said firmly:

“No, I won’t. I’m going on believing in young Anvers just as long as I can.”

CHAPTER XIII

THIN ICE

Wednesday night the weather turned bitter cold; the lake froze solidly from shore to shore. As Bunny wandered dejectedly to school the next morning, he stopped to watch the crew of men at work upon the annual ice harvest, sawing loose great squares and hewing open wide channels that stayed clear for a brief time, only to film over with a thin coating of ice. At noon, when he went home for dinner, he noticed that danger signs had been erected here and there, to warn the skaters.

“George Washington in the Revolution” had been worked out to the final sentence the night before. The composition was not as good as Bunny had hoped it might be; lots of people besides editors, he was afraid, could write better. But there was nothing to be gained by thoughts of that kind. Now that the job was done, moreover, he began to experience a sense of exultation. He had no hope of the prize, but it was like doing a good turn just for the pleasure it gave you.

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When school was dismissed at four that afternoon, he headed for the lake. All day the wind had been blowing, and now it had increased to a gale. Because of this fact, there were only a few skaters, but young Anvers was there with his ice-boat. Bunny fancied he saw the boy wave a hand to him, but he could not be quite sure.

He skated before the wind to the middle of the lake; then turned back and began to beat his way into the teeth of the blow. The fight was too fierce for pleasure, and it took him only a few minutes to decide he had his fill. Bending almost double, he pushed on toward the bonfire near the shore, watching the ice-boat swoop back and forth in long tacks to gain the same haven for which he was heading. They reached it almost together.

And then, as young Anvers stepped from his craft and lowered the sail, Bunny uttered a shrill cry, pointing with an excited hand. Far out upon the glassy surface of the lake, a tiny object was being swept along by the gale. It needed only a second glance to identify it, even before the shouts of alarm from the shore and the feminine shriek that came like an echo.

It was a combination baby-carriage, now rigged on runners instead of wheels, to make possible its use on the ice and the snow-covered ground. There was just

one such go-cart in town, and it belonged to the Anvers. And in it, at this minute, was Sanford Anvers' baby sister. As the nurse had stood warming herself at the fire, the wind had slyly caught and carried away the converted sled, slowly at first, and then with greater speed as the full force of the gale found the high sail-like back.

Nor was that all. Near the farther shore, straight in its path, was an open furrow of water, from which the ice had just been cut and hauled away. Even before that could be reached, however, there was a newly frozen strip, perhaps fifty feet in width, that might or might not bear the weight of sled and baby.

It was Bunny, scout-trained, who thought fastest. He leaped toward the ice-boat.

"Quick, Anvers! Turn it around!"

They swung the ponderous craft about. Its skipper ran up the sail and sprang aboard as the wind filled it. Instantly the boat began to move. Caught napping by its sudden movement, Bunny skated forward till he was even with the cross-piece. Then he flung himself clumsily upon the main plank, half-falling into the cockpit. Anvers stared at him with fright-glazed eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. Then his sailing skill seemed to awaken him to action. "Here, shift

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your way to port for a moment. Easy! There, that will do!"

Bunny sprawled in the cockpit, gripping its sides with shaking hands. The boat was jerking a little, but its dizzying speed made him feel queer down in the pit of his stomach. He had never traveled so fast before on land or water or ice. The gale seemed to have snatched them up as it might a scrap of paper, and was playing with them, and tossing them about carelessly, and threatening to topple them over. A dozen times they heeled, with one forward runner or the other shooting high into the air, and a dozen times Bunny prepared himself for a spill over the ice; but always he heard the iron clank back once more to the surface. The wind roared its defiance at him. The runners bit through the ice like rasping files. Instead of clear air, he was breathing frozen spray. His very eyes were so full of tears that the lake ahead seemed one blur of bluish white. And still they swept on, faster and faster, till they were literally flying.

"We're gaining — fast," mumbled young Anvers.

Bunny nodded. He was afraid to open his mouth to speak. Carefully releasing his hold of the combing with one hand, he dug a clenched fist into either eye. Now that the first thrill was gone, he began to remember his spill of the day before, when the ice-boat

was swinging along at a moderate speed, and he was afraid — afraid, that is, till he thought of the helpless baby somewhere ahead of them, sweeping forward toward the treacherous ice of the first channel and the open water of the second. When he thought of that, he forgot his own fear. He even ventured a hoarse question:

“Catch her — think?”

“Got to,” said young Anvers laconically; “my — sister!” Somehow, Bunny warmed to the other. What a scout he’d make!

They flew on. The boat was swaying now in a sickening fashion. Sails and lines were groaning and whipping. Once Bunny heard a sharp and ominous crack. The other heard it, too, and raised his head to study the mast, breathing a little sigh of relief as he saw it straight and sturdy. It seemed to Bunny they had out-distanced the wind now, but that was only a queer fancy, of course, because he could still hear it howl its defiance above the other roars.

He stole a cautious glance ahead. The sled, with its wicker back, was only a short distance from them now, but so, too, was that newly frozen ice, marked by three or four red danger sign-posts. There was just a chance that the lightly-loaded go-cart might skim over it in safety, but the heavy ice-boat, with its

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two passengers, could never make it. Perhaps with one — Bunny turned a white face to Anvers.

“ Shall — shall I drop off? ” he asked.

The boy shook his head. He calculated with a despairing eye the distances. It was clear they would reach the sled too late.

“ Don't know — know what to — do,” he gasped, the pain in his heart showing plainly as he spoke. “ Meant — skirt this — this strip and stop — stop sled 'fore it reached — open water.” Bunny noted that he still steered straight for the thin ice. “ No time — skirt now. 'Fraid — break through and — and lose chance. I — What? ”

For Bunny had interrupted the labored speech. Like a flash, he had seen the solution of the problem. Granted the sled and baby passed over the thin ice in safety, they must be halted before they reached the open water. The ice-boat could never make it. If it sank, or even if its runners broke through, the baby would sweep on to its death. But —

“ If it — gets over,” quavered Bunny, choking on the flying spray of ice and speaking into the other's very ear; “ if it — See, it's — safe now — over thin strip. Run up close — close as you can — then jam till-tiller hard — to port — jibe, see? — and swing off — in time and — ”

“But —”

They were very close to the thin ice now. Bunny fairly screamed in young Anvers' ear.

“Jam it! Over! Clear over! Jibe! Jibe! I —”

Without understanding, without knowing why he did it at all, the boy obeyed. Bracing himself in the cockpit for the shock, he put the tiller hard over.

The runners crunched protestingly. The sail flapped for a second; then jerked taut with a report like a gun. As the boat heeled dangerously, young Anvers moved to windward, calling to Bunny to add his weight.

There was no response. At that instant, Bunny Payton was spinning over the smooth ice like a hard-thrown stick, precisely as he had been sent spinning on his first trip the day before. But this time it was no accident on his part.

Calculating the change of tack nicely, he had allowed himself to be catapulted from the shallow cockpit as the boat came about. It was the same result that is achieved when the last boy in “crack-the-whip” is shot head over heels by the other skaters. There had been a tremendous shock as Bunny hit the ice, and then a dizzying hysteria of momentary fear. But even as he whirled forward, like a shot from a cannon, his head cleared.

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He knew when he spun upon the freshly frozen ice of the channel. He heard it crack time after time, so rapidly that he could not count. He even felt it sag a little under his weight. And then, as his momentum lessened, he sensed a new surface beneath him, and he knew he had passed the danger portion in safety.

The instant he could get control of his sprawling arms and legs, which seemed determined to wave like those of a straw scarecrow, he dug his finger-nails into the ice and ground the heels of his skates into its surface. These movements braked him to a stop almost at once. Then he leaped to his feet, fearful that he was too late.

But he was not. As a matter of fact, he had spun ahead of the go-cart and its precious human freight, although somewhat to one side. It was the work of only a few seconds, therefore, to skate stiffly over to the remodeled carriage, grasp its handle, and guide it away from the open water toward which it had been heading.

About the time the ice-boat came swinging up, having skirted the far end of the strip of thin ice, the baby was looking into Bunny Payton's white face and gurgling happily. Young Anvers smiled, too, but more slowly, as if he had never expected to again;

and then, of course, there was nothing for Bunny to do but laugh a little himself.

“I wish,” said young Anvers — this was an hour later, after the baby had been turned over to its frightened nurse again — “I wish there was a vacancy in the Black Eagle Patrol. I’d like to join.”

“But you can train with us, anyhow,” Bunny told him eagerly, “and go on hikes with us, and play games with us — like baseball. Only I supposed —”

“You supposed what?”

“Why, that you didn’t think much of scouts and —”

“Why shouldn’t I, after I saw you save my little sister out there? You thought faster and acted faster than I did.”

“—and that you wouldn’t have anything to do with the Black Eagle Patrol unless I won that prize for the best composition.”

“Oh, that! Fact is, Bunny — they call you Bunny, don’t they — fact is, Dad’s been helping me with my composition. I didn’t imagine it was against the rules, but when I asked Miss Pedder, she said it was. So I told her I wouldn’t turn in any composition at all. I meant to tell you yesterday, but I felt so mean about jibing my ice-boat without warning you to hold fast that I couldn’t get up the nerve to speak to you again.

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I — I wanted to be square, of course, about the contest.”

“Of course,” agreed Bunny. “I — Say, how are you at baseball, anyhow — pretty good?”

CHAPTER XIV

DOLLARS AND FROST AND FIRE

But the winning of Sanford Anvers meant much more than the mere addition of a player for the baseball team. Bunny was passing, one by one, the various tests that would advance him to the rank of first-class scout, and Number 12 in the Manual had worried him greatly. It said uncompromisingly that he must "enlist a boy trained by himself in the requirements of a tenderfoot." Until young Anvers confessed his ambition to become a scout, this had seemed impossible. Now it was ridiculously simple.

That night Bunny thumbed the pages of his Manual again, checking off the tests he had passed. He could swim fifty yards, signal, give first aid, cook, read a map, use an axe, judge distance and size and number and height and weight within twenty-five per cent., describe ten trees and plants, prove he had followed the principles of the scout oath and law in his daily life, earn — Hello, there was a test he hadn't passed. He whistled softly; his account at the Merchants' Na-

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tional was exactly what it had been when he advanced from tenderfoot to second-class scout.

"Well," he said with a smile, "I'll have to get out and hustle, I guess."

Nobody in Lakeville seemed to need the services of a small boy. Bunny tried the men in their stores and offices; the women in their homes, and the occasional traveling man who stopped at the Waldorf Inn; but none of them had anything for him to do. Then Scout Master Stanton told him Farmer Benton was looking for a helper. When Bunny presented himself, however, Farmer Benton (who was just as much a fisherman as he was a farmer) shook his head.

"I want a growed-up boy," he said; "a smart boy. You won't do."

There wasn't any way for Bunny to prove offhand that he was smart. Discouraged, he resumed his search for work all over again, trying so honestly to find what did not seem to exist just then that his aunt finally took pity on him.

"If you'll scour all my pots and pans each Saturday," she promised, "I'll pay you ten cents a week."

Bunny jumped at the chance. The other fellows laughed at him, and Specs called him "K. M.," which is short for kitchen mechanic; but Bunny grinned and persevered. For five consecutive Saturdays he

rubbed pots and pans with "Scour-O," the favorite cleaner of the Sawyer household, and at the end of each completed job his aunt gave him the promised dime.

The fifth Saturday he also polished up the reel and the metal tip and bands of his uncle's fishing-pole, which showed the effects of non-use by rusting a little. Scour-O did the work so well that Bunny wrote a letter about it to the manufacturers, who invited suggestions in their circular.

Before another Saturday came, several things happened. The manufacturers of Scour-O answered his letter, thanking him for the idea, and "trusting he would accept the little present they were forwarding under separate cover." The present was a wonderful fish-pole. Its receipt created a mild sensation in the village, and the *Weekly Argus* printed a full account of the matter. Farmer Benton (who, as has been explained, was just as much a fisherman as he was a farmer) sent for him, reproached him for not telling before what a smart boy he was, and gave him enough odd jobs to net him one dollar.

Bunny might have gone on earning ten cents a week from his aunt. He did continue scouring the pots and pans each Saturday, but he declined to accept payment for it.

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"After what it brought me," he explained, "I'm calling it a good turn, and a scout must not take pay for good turns."

So he still lacked fifty cents of the two dollars that must be earned and deposited as one of the tests of qualifying for a first-class scout. How was he to do it?

No way presented itself for several weeks. Winter slowly gave way to spring, the sun warmed and coaxed the growing things in the fields and woods, and all outdoors stretched and waked up again.

"I'll begin asking people for work," Bunny decided, growing desperate. "I must earn that fifty cents."

This time luck seemed to be with him. The third man he approached was a Mr. Meacham, who had a farm about two miles from town, on the Grand View road.

"So you want something to do, do you? Want to keep out of mischief, maybe. Why, yes, I can use you this afternoon, I guess, helping me in my orchard."

Bunny began at one o'clock, worked steadily till fifteen minutes after six, walked the two miles to town, and was late to supper. Even then, his aunt noticed, he ate practically nothing.

"Not sick, are you, George?"

“No-o, ma’am.”

“I hope you didn’t overdo. I believe in work and thrift — By the way, how much did Mr. Meacham pay you?”

The boy turned away quickly; he was not quite sure of his eyes. Then “Nothing!” he flung out. “Nothing — not a cent!” He dug his two fists into the swimming eyes. “I — I worked, Aunt Emma, till my back ached and my hands were all blistered. When I was through, he called me. ‘You’re a Boy Scout, I see,’ he said, looking at my uniform. I told him I was and waited. He sort of smiled. ‘I understand a Boy Scout can’t take pay for good turns,’ he said next. And, of course, I told him that was right. Then he smiled again. ‘Thanks,’ he said; ‘thanks for the good turn you’ve done me this afternoon.’ And he went into the house, Aunt Emma, and shut the door, and didn’t pay me a cent; and he called out from inside that I had offered to help him, and mustn’t think he had hired me to work or meant to pay me anything.”

Uncle Henry Sawyer, who had been listening, rose abruptly and went outside, slamming the door after him. Aunt Emma Sawyer put an arm about Bunny’s shoulders and pushed the hair off his forehead. They did not speak for a minute or two.

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"I hope, George," she ventured presently, "that you're going to face your trouble as a good scout would."

"I hope so," said Bunny. He smiled wanly. "I guess, Aunt Emma, that's about all there is to do."

But he could not forget. If the memory dimmed at all, it became more distinct the following Saturday afternoon at sight of Meacham's farm. The Black Eagle Patrol had been hiking, and was homeward bound on the Grand View road. Already the sun had sunk redly in the west, leaving behind a chill that crept into the marrow of their bones. And Lakeville was still three miles away.

"Br-r-r!" shivered Specs. "It's cold."

"Is it?" asked Roundy innocently. "I hadn't noticed that, but it's sure half past supper-time."

Patrol Leader Judge Lloyd edged over to S. S. "Sing something," he suggested. "Let's make them forget the cold and the hunger."

An instant later S. S.'s clear tenor rang out in "Marching Through Georgia." The refrain was quickly taken up by the other scouts with lusty vigor, and their stamping feet stirred the dust in perfect time. For another mile, almost to the turn of the road, they plodded on with fresh enthusiasm. Then, at the end

of the chorus, the song and the hiking band of boys stopped at one and the same time. From Roundy came a plaintive:

“Say, but I’m hungry.”

They rounded the bend with disordered and lagging steps. Ahead of them, on the right, loomed the farmhouse and orchards of Mr. Meacham.

“Let’s drop in on the ‘Miser’ for supper,” suggested Roundy. “He’d feed us.”

“Yes, he would — on work!” mocked Bi, unconsciously tensing the muscles of his arms. “I only wish those pet trees of his were loaded with apples instead of blossoms. We’d take some for what he owes Bunny.”

“What kind of trees are they?” asked Sanford Anvers, who was hiking with the patrol.

“I don’t know what they’re called,” Bunny answered, “but he is prouder of them than he is of all the others. They’re a grafted stock of a combination of early fruits; none of the other trees is in blossom yet. This is the first year these eight — just a patrol of them, you see — have borne.”

“I wish,” said Judge uneasily, “we’d gone home by some other road. I’m afraid —”

Just what he was afraid of, he did not say. But Bunny, pacing along at his heels, knew well enough.

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The scouts were in the mood for vengeance; cold and hungry, they might prove difficult to restrain.

Sure enough, they swarmed through Miser Meacham's gate like an invading army, and they double-quickened up Miser Meacham's path, and they hammered lustily upon Miser Meacham's door. Then they waited — not peaceably nor quietly.

But nobody answered the summons. They hammered again on the door. They hallooed a greeting that was more like a command to appear. Bi even twisted the knob and put his shoulder against the panels.

"Bi!" It was Judge's stern voice. "If Mr. Meacham isn't home —"

"I just wanted to see," said Bi a little shamefacedly.

It was obvious, though, that the fruit-grower was away. They circled the house to the back door and tried that. They searched through the barn, to the discomfiture of the two horses that gazed upon them with reproving eyes. They climbed to the hay-mow, rank with stifling dust, and poked about, quite as if there were an enemy in hiding. But no Miser Meacham did they find.

"Come on, fellows," urged Judge. "Let's hike along."

"Humph!" said Nap vaguely.

"Why?" demanded Bi flatly. "He owes Bunny for the work he did the other day. Let's edge into the house through a window and eat up the pay."

"And get warm," added Specs.

Judge shifted his weight to the other foot. He was a boy himself, and he knew exactly how they all felt toward Meacham. But what they purposed doing was out of the question. Why, even Bunny would tell them that. But when he turned to speak to him, Bunny was nowhere about. He came into sight a moment later, walking from the direction of the orchard.

"Judge," he said, "there's a thermometer over there. It registers just thirty-four now, and the mercury's sinking. The air is as still as it ever gets — no breeze, you know. Before many minutes, something is going to happen."

"Exactly! Exactly! We're going to be on our way to Lakeville."

"I know what he means," put in young Anvers. "Dad gets the weather report each morning in the mail. To-day it said there might be frost."

"That's it — frost." Bunny tried to speak slowly and evenly, but his voice rang with a queer exultation. "In less than half an hour, maybe, there's going to be

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a frost. And do you know what it will do? I've seen them come in California. It will kill every last blossom on those eight pet trees of Meacham's — spoil the whole crop this year. And — and I'm glad!"

"So are we, Bunny!" "Hurrah for Jack Frost!"
"Let her come!" "Serves the old tight-wad right!"
"Three cheers, fellows!"

They gave them with happy abandon. The snapper on the end was like the explosion of a bomb.

"Fellows —" began Judge.

"Aw, shucks!" protested Bi. "We aren't making the frost, you know, and we can't put nighties on the trees and tuck 'em into bed."

"I know, but — I'm sorry you're taking it this way."

The scouts were ready to continue their hike now; for the mischief would be done, whether they stayed or went. Judge found little trouble, therefore, in getting them started toward town. As they marched from the yard, little S. S. hummed gleefully a line or two from "When It's Apple-Blossom Time in Normandy." But only two or three of the fellows laughed; by this time, curiously enough, they were beginning to think of the damaging frost, not as a joke, but as a menace.

"Meacham ought to carry a circus tent in his

pocket," suggested Nap, "and put it up over the trees on cold nights."

"There must be some way of preventing frost," said the practical Handy; "some way of covering the fruit."

"They use tar-paper in the West," Bunny explained.

"For trees?"

"Oh, I meant for small fruits; for bushes and vines."

"But if you could warm the air enough," Nap persisted, "you could drive the frost away. Only I suppose a bonfire wouldn't do; it would burn the trees."

"Yes," said Bunny. "Yes." Then, all at once, he burst forth into a very flood of speech, talking so fast they could hardly understand. "I can't keep still, fellows. I wanted to; I tried to. But it's no use. All I had to do was to keep still and let the frost kill the crop. And you all know what Miser Meacham did to me; how he treated me. But I can't. We may be able to save those blossoms. Shall we?"

Nobody spoke at first. Then Bi said awkwardly; "Aw, well, why not?" Nap said: "We're with you, Bunny, if you'll lead." Judge said: "I'm glad you offered." Handy leaned forward with a single word: "How?"

"In California," Bunny went on, "some of the

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fruit-growers keep off the frost by stirring up the air with electric fans; it won't settle, you know, when there's a breeze. They have their orchards all wired and ready, with gongs hooked to the thermometers, and all that kind of thing. We can't use fans, of course. But others out there — pretty nearly all of them now, I guess — use fires. They build them in smudge-pots that —"

"Smudge-pots?" It was Handy's alert voice. "What are they? Can we make them? How many would we need? What's the idea?"

"A smudge-pot," said Bunny slowly, as if he were reciting a lesson, "is a kind of stove. I've seen home-made ones that did the business all right, and we fellows could throw some together in a jiffy, because I saw just what we needed in the barn. Out West they use about forty to the acre, or one to every tree; that would mean eight for Meacham's pet 'patrol.' We could burn the trimmings piled up over there, and I guess there will be enough, because I worked a good while that day to cut them. The idea of the smudge-pots is to send the heat up high to the blossoms, where it's needed; to keep off the frost by warming the air, and to keep down the heat of the earth and the trees by making a cover of smoke and smudge over everything."

"Great!" shouted Handy. "Quick! What do we make the stoves of?"

"There are two kinds I've seen. One is made out of ten-pound lard pails. You put legs on them and slash the bottoms into grates. There are three old pails back of the barn. The other kind is made of stove-pipe. You cut it about two feet long, stick in some sort of a wire grate six inches or so from the bottom, and ram a lot of holes in the pipe below this to get a draft. And there's a bunch of stove-pipe stored in the barn."

"Come on!" shouted Handy, turning back toward Meacham's yard. "Come on, fellows, and beat the frost!"

"Yes, come on!" echoed Bunny. "Come on, fellows, because I ask you!"

They came with a rush and a cheer, as enthusiastic now about saving the choice crop as they had been earlier about allowing it to be destroyed. Perhaps it was merely the novelty, or the natural reaction, or the example of the boy whom Meacham had treated so shabbily. In any event, they were his to command.

Once more, too, they worked with the speed, the system, and the sure methods of the scout teachings. Specs and S. S. lighted the two lanterns they found

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in the barn. Nap and Roundy brought the empty lard pails. Judge and young Anvers pulled out length after length of stove-pipe. Bi, the strong, Handy, the mechanic, and Bunny, the fellow who had seen home-made smudge-pots, joined hands in the manufacture. Not a minute was wasted.

Bi drove huge spikes through the bottoms of the pails; these served as legs. A stout-bladed knife ripped plenty of holes for drafts. Then the crude stoves were tossed to the other scouts, who promptly packed kindling and fuel for the fires. The stove-pipes offered greater difficulties, but the same stout-bladed knife hacked and sawed them off into two-foot lengths, and more of the spikes, driven criss-cross some six inches from the ends, made acceptable grates. With the vents under them cut for air, these other smudge-pots were ready.

They carried them out to Miser Meacham's eight early-blossoming apple trees. Bunny superintended the placing of each of the pipes and pails in such a way that its fire would heat the air without damaging tree-trunk or foliage. Then Bi and Judge pumped and carried to a convenient spot a large tub of water, to spray the flames and produce smoke and smudge.

"There are just eight smudge-pots," Bunny told them. "That's one for each of you to tend, includ-

ing Anvers. I'm going to take one of the horses from the barn and ride to town. Mr. Meacham's probably there. If he isn't, I'll bring Mr. Stanton back with me. Ready to light the fires, fellows?"

"Ready!" chorused eight eager voices.

Judge's was the first to flare. It began with a feeble flicker, but as the air sucked through the holes below the grate, climbed speedily till it was a roaring little furnace. A douche of water dulled it somewhat, changing the red flame to white smoke that curled lazily among the branches of the tree. Seven other fires crackled and blazed.

Once the smudge-pots were burning evenly, Bunny raced to the stable and saddled and bridled a horse. He climbed to its back, clucking happily and slapping its thigh with his open hand. For some reason, he was singularly happy; he felt like shouting or singing, but he contented himself with whistling. Now that the fires were going, he was glad, immensely glad, that he had not remained silent and allowed the frost to nip the tender blossoms. Already the grass in the fields was coating with a glistening blanket of white.

He looked back once. The sky was red above the orchard, and the trees stood out in gaunt silhouettes. On the ground, like incense pots, the tiny stoves glowed crimson.

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It was two miles to Lakeville, but he rode them without once reining up. Beneath the horse's galloping hoofs, the road flowed backward like a river. Bunny could ride well, for he had owned a pony before moving to Lakeville, and he felt a strange elation as he swept past fences and trees and trim farmhouses.³ He might have sent help to the scouts from these latter, but he knew the fellows would do their duty till he brought back Mr. Meacham or Mr. Stanton.

There was a light in the scout master's office. Bunny rode to the hitching post before the building, threw the reins over it, and pounded up the steps.

"Mr. — Mr. Stanton," he gasped, "have you seen Miser — Miser Meacham?"

The scout master jumped to his feet. Quite without knowing it, he clenched his fists. "Why, yes; he's down at the hotel talking with a seed salesman. But — What's wrong? Has he been doing something to you fellows?"

"No, sir," panted Bunny. "We — we've been doing something to him, I guess." And then he blurted out the whole story. Mr. Stanton heard him to the end without interrupting, but once the explanation was clear, he sprang into action. He slipped on his coat, dragged the boy down the steps faster than he had

come up them, and raced with him to the Waldorf, where they found Miser Meacham almost at once.

The scout master told him the situation in a few tense, compact sentences. At first, as was quite natural, the fruit farmer looked skeptical, and more worried about the damage the boys might do to his pet trees than about frost danger. But the seed salesman had heard of such remedies. He clapped a congratulatory hand upon Bunny's shoulder. "Plucky kid!" he said. "Come on, Mr. Meacham, we'll go out with you. I don't believe you'll lose an apple. Can you get some helpers to relieve those chaps on duty?"

Mr. Meacham could. But even after they were on their way back to his farm, with a dozen volunteers and some crude oil for fuel, to say nothing of Mr. Stanton and Bunny Payton, he appeared puzzled.

"What I don't understand, youngster," he said finally, "is why you did this for me. I — Well, I thought you hated me."

"It's our" — Bunny hesitated for the word — "our business to do a good turn whenever we can. And we try not to save them all for our friends. I guess that's why."

Mr. Meacham said nothing more. By this time

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they were within sight of the orchard, which resembled nothing more than a mass of dimly lighted Christmas trees. The wagon was driven close to them, the barrel of oil unloaded, and the men from town relieved the begrimed scouts.

Perhaps ten minutes later, Judge gathered his patrol about him.

"Fellows," he said, "Mr. Stanton says we'd better hike for town now. He's going to stay and help keep the fires going till the danger is over."

Specs shivered. Away from the smudge-pots, it was still chilly enough to be uncomfortable.

"I wish we could carry along our stoves," he said. "I'm cold."

"And I'm tired," confessed S. S., thinking of the two-mile hike to town.

"I wouldn't mind being cold and tired so much," added Roundy, "if I wasn't so all-fired hungry."

"Boys"—it was Miser Meacham speaking—"boys, you go into my house, and warm up a bit, and rest a bit, and eat—well, more than a bit, and then hitch my team to the double-seater and drive to town. Leave it at the Waldorf livery. Tell Jim to get the horse this young fellow rode in when he came after me, too." He paused to grin over the gasps of delight from the scouts. "Unless," he added thoughtfully,

“you can’t accept anything for your good turn.”

Judge looked at the eight boys. The appeals on their faces might have softened the heart of a cigar-store Indian.

“That wouldn’t be exactly pay,” he said thoughtfully. “We’ll accept.”

As the scouts marched into the warm house, trying hard not to crowd or become boisterous, Miser Meacham spoke again.

“There’s another little matter I want to settle. One of you there worked for me the other afternoon. I pretended — more to myself, I guess, than to anybody else — that he was only doing a good turn. But he wasn’t; he was working for pay, and he deserved pay. Now, after you boys have saved my crop because he asked you to and because he showed you how, I feel mighty small and mean. I’m a bit too old to join you scouts, but perhaps I can learn from you. If you will tell me how much I owe you, young man, I’ll settle.”

“Well,” said Bunny, “I figure I ought to earn about ten cents an hour. I worked for you from one o’clock to a quarter after six; that makes five and a quarter hours. At ten cents an hour, it comes to fifty-two and a half cents — say, an even fifty-two. I hope you’ll find that right.”

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There was a hail from outside. Mr. Meacham walked toward the door.

“I do,” he declared, turning. “I find everything about you Boy Scouts right — absolutely right. Coming, Stanton!”

CHAPTER XV

SOMETHING FOR SOMETHING

It must not be supposed that the boys forgot, even for a single minute, their ambition to have the Black Eagle Patrol known as the best in the State. The new policy of "one for all and all for one" was fast developing a general standard of efficiency in scoutcraft that other patrols would find it hard to match. The baseball nine threw and caught and batted and fielded till these things were as easy as walking or jumping out of bed mornings. Weather permitting, the fellows practiced jumping, running, climbing, the "pull-up," the "push-up from the floor," and putting the eight-pound shot. Merit badges in the various fields were won by some scout or other almost every week.

As for Mr. Sefton, whose newspaper had been responsible for this new competitive interest, it is enough to say that he was even more enthusiastic than the scouts themselves. After a conference with Mr. Porter, the State Boy Scout Commissioner, he announced that each patrol (or, in the larger towns and

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cities where there were several patrols, each troop) was to hold a field day on its home grounds. There were to be contests in scoutcraft, in woodcraft, in campcraft, in tracking and trailing and signaling, in first aid and life saving, and in athletic events. Each patrol was to be graded on its performances in this home meet by a committee from Mr. Sefton's newspaper and from the State headquarters of the Boy Scouts. The two patrols ranking highest were to clash in a special tournament at Elkana.

In this way, of course, nearly every town in the State would have its own field day, and nearly every boy would have his chance to see—and probably envy—the scouts in action. Moreover, it would make unnecessary the delicate problems of financing trips for hundreds of patrols, which might bar some worthy competitors. The two winners, Mr. Sefton announced, would be brought to the tournament at the expense of his paper.

The members of the Black Eagle Patrol talked of little else that spring. When it rained, and they found it impossible to run on the muddy roads, they longed for a cinder track. When Mr. Stanton was out of town, and they could not use his offices for their meetings, they longed for a club-house. When it was cold in the barn belonging to Roundy's father,

or stuffy and dark (and the hay-mow was always stuffy and dark), they longed for a real gymnasium. But the building of a permanent home for the patrol remained a sleeping ambition until Bunny took hold of it.

"Let's put up that house," he said one day. "Lots of others have done it. I've seen pictures myself, and I'll bet they aren't any smarter fellows or better scouts than we are."

Everybody agreed. They had been waiting, it seemed, for a leader. So they took the proposition to Mr. Stanton.

"Of course," the scout master said heartily, "we want a place we can use for both a club-house and a gymnasium. But I want to tell you now, at the beginning, that it is easier to think of that sort of thing than it is to get it."

"Napoleon once built —" began Nap, but Bi shut off further speech by the simple process of pressing a muscled forearm across his throat. The scout master smiled and went on.

"In many sections of the country, I suppose, there are scouts who have rich parents and who can afford a club-house. That's not true with us, though, and I don't feel we have any right to beg money from outsiders. Just the same, I know you can get the house

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if you really want it. But you will have to pay for it, each one of you — not in money, perhaps, but in time or work or something else. Do you want a club-house enough to pay for it? ”

“ I should say we do ! ” shouted Specs. The others laughed.

“ All right ! ” agreed Mr. Stanton. “ Put the matter to a vote. Then, if it carries, elect somebody to take charge of the whole scheme. ”

Every single member of the patrol voted for the club-house, and every single member voted for Bunny as the director of the enterprise.

“ He’s the one who made us get busy on the job, ” said Judge in nominating him, “ and, even if he is the newest member of the patrol, he may be able to do what’s to be done better than the rest of us. He’s lived in the city and knows more about business than we do. ”

So Bunny went to work. It was a pleasant task for him. Since his arrival in the village, he had felt himself rather at a disadvantage. A new boy, rather younger and decidedly smaller than the other scouts, he had not enjoyed the chance of leading that he secretly coveted. His brief generalship in saving Mr. Meacham’s orchard had only fired his ambition. And here, at last, he was to be given full sway. With him

rested the success or the failure of the club-house.

He went first to Farmer Benton, whose land lay close to Lakeville, and had a long talk with that good friend. He interviewed the Palmer brothers, who did most of the wood-cutting in that vicinity. He talked with Mr. Reddy, the owner of the saw-mill. He conferred daily with the scout master, as well as with Handy, who seemed to possess a knack of overcoming practical difficulties. He studied prices with the manager of the Lakeville Coal, Wood and Ice Company, which also sold cement and slack and lime, and might be induced to deal in cinders. He even visited Mr. Albertson, the retired contractor.

For the club-house that the Black Eagle Patrol elected to build was not to be any common two-by-twice log cabin. On the contrary, its main room must be large enough for council proceedings, for an occasional entertainment, and for a gymnasium.

As he progressed, Bunny came to think of the house almost as his own. He took a personal pride in each difficulty he overcame, in each step he made in the right direction, in each advance in the plans and possibilities. He felt an unwillingness to tell the others what he had done. Instead of letting them into his confidence, he promised them that they should hear about everything in two weeks.

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This was none too short a time for him to finish the details of his work, but he managed to do it. When he presented his report to the scouts at the regular Friday evening meeting in Mr. Stanton's offices, he was tired but very proud and happy.

"Fellows," he said exultantly, "I think I've arranged everything. The rest is up to you."

"Tell us all about it," put in Judge; "tell us what you've been doing. You haven't said a word outside, and we're all in the dark."

Bunny faced the patrol confidently. "The first thing to do was to get a place for the club-house. I found out that there was no land we could use in the village; the best possible site was on Farmer Benton's place, where it touches the foot of Oak Street. I saw him about it, and he said we could put up our house there if we paid him ten dollars a year."

"Who's going to dig down for that money?" interrupted Bi.

"I'm coming to that. You know Farmer Benton raises a lot of strawberries. I asked him if we could work it out during the berry season. He said we could. Well, the eight of us, working a little over a day apiece, can earn that ten dollars and more."

Bunny paused. Roundy and Nap looked at each other uncomfortably.

"That settled the land question," the speaker went on. "The next thing was the timber for the house. It took me a long while to figure how to get that. Finally I asked Farmer Benton to furnish it himself."

"Free?" asked S. S.

"Not exactly — only it won't cost us anything. I told him we wanted the house for only four or five years at the most, and that at the end of that time we would turn it over to him in good condition. I explained that he could partition it into two or three rooms and rent it to some of the folks who come here for the summer. You see, he won't lose a cent. So he's willing to give us all the timber we need."

"But who's going to cut it?" demanded Specs. "And who's going to haul it?"

"That's all fixed, too. The saw-mill man — Mr. Reddy — told me that they're expecting a lot of rush business this next month, and that if Bi would come down every night after school and Saturdays, and take the same job he had before, they'd saw and trim the logs for nothing."

"You don't say!" grumbled Bi. "How long do they expect me to work there? The rest of my life?"

"No, only two weeks. You see, if this thing is to go through, everybody must give up something. The Palmer brothers will haul the logs for nothing, if

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Judge will let them have that big white fir-tree near his barn." He turned to the patrol leader. "You know the one I mean—that big fellow your father calls your tree." Unconscious of the frown that was darkening Judge's face, he looked toward the scout master. "Mr. Stanton is giving up a trip to Chicago, so he can hire a regular architect to draw up the plans."

As he hesitated for a moment, the other scouts wriggled uneasily in their chairs.

"Building a running track is just a matter of work. There are lots of books with the plans. The Lakeville Coal, Wood and Ice Company will turn over a load of cinders to us if we'll pay for them by working in the yards loading and unloading wood and kindling.

"We'll need some money, of course, to pay for nails and hinges and things like that for the house. But I happen to know that two members of the patrol can give up money very easily if they feel like it."

S. S. began to finger his necktie nervously. Roundy, scowling, shook his head at the floor.

"What do you expect me to give up?" queried Specs.

"You'll have to swallow some pride," returned Bunny. "You know that Mr. Albertson was a star

contractor and builder before he retired. I've spoken to him, and he says he'll come out every day and see that we do the work right if you'll apologize to that old lady for allowing her eggs to be broken."

"I paid her for her eggs, didn't I?" snapped Specs.

"Well, you must apologize, too. Anyhow, Specs, you owe it to her."

Specs did not answer. Nobody seemed to want to talk much about the club-house any more. Even Roundy, with whom Bunny walked home, was unusually silent. But it was not till the following Monday that the boy in charge discovered there was opposition.

"I've been thinking this thing over," S. S. told him at recess, "and I've made up my mind that we ought to wait a while before we build. We can get along without a club-house."

"That's right," said Nap. "Besides, it would mean a lot of work. We'd all have to work like a lot of dogs just when vacation was coming, and it might not be a success even then. They've got a lot of new books about Napoleon at the library, too, that I want time to read."

Roundy had strolled up to them. He added his ideas on the subject. "I think," he suggested, "we'd better drop the idea of having a club-house this sum-

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mer and go in for a camping trip. That's what I've always wanted. Besides, we can use the turning-pole and weights and things in Roundy's barn, and we can hold regular meetings at Stanton's."

"But," protested Bunny, "you all said you wanted a club-house."

"Well, I've changed my mind," said Nap. "Napoleon changed his mind more than once, and I guess other people have a right to do the same thing."

It was a crushing blow for Bunny. Not only had he counted on the pleasure of directing the building of the house, but he had enjoyed, during his brief activity, a greater consideration from his uncle. Buck had been a born leader, and Buck's father had been inclined to be a bit contemptuous of the smaller Bunny. Since the beginning of the new enterprise, however, he had looked upon his nephew with more friendly eyes. In addition, his aunt had been so openly proud of him and his first successes that he felt he could not afford to drop the whole thing without fighting to the last ditch.

That night, after school, he called Judge aside.

"What's the matter, Judge?" he asked. "Why won't the fellows help out on this thing?"

The patrol leader attempted to evade answering, but Bunny insisted.

“Well,” Judge said at last, “it’s this point of giving up.”

“But we all knew we’d have to give up something,” retorted Bunny, frankly surprised. “We have to pay for everything we get, in one way or another. Before we even started, Mr. Stanton told us that.”

“I know,” Judge nodded. “I’m not growling. I never knew that white fir was worth anything till you told me the Palmers wanted it. They have a standing order to look out for trees that will make masts for sailing yachts. That’s why they’re willing to give me twenty-five dollars for it just as it stands. Of course, though, I’d be glad to contribute it toward building the club-house if I thought everybody else was giving up something, but —”

“Why, everybody is. Bi is going to give up a whole lot of his time, Specs is going to swallow his pride, S. S. is —”

“I know, Bunny; that’s all right. But what are you giving up? You’re running the whole affair, and you ought to set an example.”

Bunny flushed. “I haven’t any money; you know that. But I’m going to give up all the time I can working on it. That’s all Nap was asked to do.”

“Nap’s case is different,” Judge said. “Nap hates to work, particularly when somebody else is bossing

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the job. There's a — well, a difference. You see, the fellows don't say so right out, but they don't believe you're very much in earnest about getting the club-house done. They think you like to feel you're running things, and maybe wouldn't be so enthusiastic if you had to give up something yourself."

That evening Bunny tossed about in his bed for an hour or more before sleep came to him. He tried a hundred times to persuade himself that he had nothing to give up, but he knew, deep down in his heart, that he was only crawling away from the issue. He woke in the night and worried again, and it was not till morning that he finally decided.

He stopped for Judge on the way to school. "Judge," he said, "I think I've been all wrong, but after this I'm going to try to be all right. There's just one thing I can give up, and that is the chance of bossing this business. I didn't know how much that meant to me till I stopped to think it over. I guess I was mighty selfish about it. Anyhow, if it will help make the fellows feel I am in earnest, I'll give it up and work just as hard — yes, harder — with somebody else running things."

Judge looked at him carefully. "It's a go, Bunny. As a matter of fact, I — I didn't really believe in you myself. I thought you were getting everything and

giving nothing. Now I see you're with us on the job."

Slowly but surely, the patrol veered back again in favor of the club-house. Roundy gave up his cherished camping trip, Bi his time, Judge his tree, Nap his reading hours, and so on down the line. Mr. Albertson proved an exacting but conscientious overseer — after Specs had apologized. The plan was a beauty. The workers plodded like beavers from day-break till nightfall. And, although the building rose more slowly than they had hoped, the Black Eagle Patrol drove every nail straight and true.

Handy and S. S. gave up, without a whimper, the two five-dollar gold pieces that in the ordinary course of things would have come to them at Christmas. Roundy contributed a third five dollars with a heavy sigh.

"I was given this," he explained, "for promising not to eat any cake or pie or candy for a whole year." He shook his head regretfully. "I bet I'm giving up more for that club-house than anybody else in the patrol."

There was an idea in the village that the handsome structure, together with the quarter-mile cinder running-track back of it, had cost nothing. But the scouts laughed at this supposition.

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“As a matter of fact,” Judge explained to one questioner, “it was pretty expensive, although not in actual money. But you pay for things in lots of other ways. It’s just about impossible to get something for nothing in this world.”

“Which,” added Bunny wisely, as one who has learned a lesson, “is exactly as it should be.”

CHAPTER XVI

INDIANS

There was still one test for Bunny to pass before he could become a first-class scout. He spoke of it to several of the fellows.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said Specs. “You pick out some place with a good road leading — Say, I’ll tell you what. You make that hike a real one, and I’ll go with you.”

So it happened that ten minutes later Scout Master Stanton looked over his desk into the flushed faces of these two, and listened to Bunny’s explanation.

“So you’re almost ready to become a first-class scout, are you? And you want to make this hike with Specs? That’s great, boys. Now, let’s see exactly what the Manual says about the qualifying hike. Here it is: ‘The second-class scout . . . must make a round trip alone (or with another scout) to a point at least seven miles away, going on foot or rowing a boat, and write a satisfactory account of the trip and

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things observed.' Well, that shouldn't be difficult. Where are you going? Miller's Corners? Stebbin's Rock? Or —"

"If you please, sir," ventured Bunny, "we'd like to hike to Mammoth Mound."

"H'm!" Mr. Stanton looked over their heads. "Bi started for there once, I remember, and managed to get lost. You chaps are pretty young to —"

"Please!" said Bunny.

"I'll take care of him," Specs added gravely.

Mr. Stanton walked over to the window. He seemed to be very good-natured about something.

"Why, yes," he said; "yes, indeed. There's no real reason in the world why you shouldn't go there. If you tramp across country, it won't prove too far. I know you're both trained till you're as hard as nails, so you can make it there and back in a day. And you can dig for Indian arrow-heads in the mound, provided you get permission from Mr. Robinson, who owns the land. When you get back, Bunny, write me an account of the trip. If it proves satisfactory" — and he smiled over the hundredth chance that it might not — "you may consider yourself ready to become a first-class scout. When are you planning to go?"

"Next Saturday — if it doesn't rain."

"Probably anyhow," supplemented Specs. "Much obliged."

"You're quite welcome," said Mr. Stanton dryly. "Make this final test one worthy of a true scout, Bunny, a true, first-class scout. I — The fact is, I'm rather proud that you've been trained in a patrol of which I am scout master."

The other fellows, of course, learned of the hike. On Saturday morning, when Bunny and Specs left the club-house, each clad in a khaki uniform, with a knapsack over his shoulder and a stout staff in his hand, the members of the patrol gave them a rousing send-off. Roundy even walked the first mile with them.

"And now, fellows," he said confidentially, when he was preparing to leave them, "just one last word. Look out for Indians!"

"Rats!" snapped Specs.

"There aren't any around this part of the world," Bunny reminded him.

"No?" Roundy smiled lazily up into the blue sky. "No? Well, you bear this in mind. The Indians built that mound. They swore to guard it forever and ever. And they do say —" He looked about him, as if fearing he might be overheard; then he clapped a hand over his mouth. "Well, never mind that. It isn't likely any Indians would attack scouts,

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is it? Good luck, fellows — only keep your eyes peeled for feathers and war-paint!”

Bunny and Specs plodded on for several minutes without speaking. Then the latter turned a speculative glance upon Roundy, who was fast disappearing down the road to town.

“He thinks he’s funny,” he remarked contemptuously. “Indians! Huh! I’d just like to meet a band of them looking for trouble. That’s what I’d like.”

“I didn’t suppose there were any more Indians outside of books,” Bunny reflected aloud.

“Oh, yes, lots of them out there.” Specs waved expansively toward the west. “Maybe they come on here now and then to see if the mound is all right, but —”

“Wouldn’t it be — queer if we did see some?”

“Wouldn’t it?” echoed Specs without much enthusiasm.

They left the road and plunged into the woods. Squirrels scolded at them from the tree limbs, birds flew before them, and, now and then, the bushes moved mysteriously, as if strange animals were watching their progress — or Indians!

As they hiked, Bunny mapped neatly their journey, to show the exact route they were following, and jot-

ted down occasional notes that he hoped to embody later in his account of the trip. He kept track of the different kinds of trees; of the mosses on their trunks; of the ferns in the gullies; of the open places on the hill-tops, where they stopped to get their bearings and look backward at the village; and of the tracks he discovered in the soft ground, some of them almost exactly those of moccasined feet. He attempted a record of the sounds, ranging from the chatter of squirrels and cries of birds to the drone of the light breeze that rustled before them like an unseen ghost.

Almost before they knew it, the noon hour had come, and they sat down on a fallen log and ate the sandwiches they were carrying. Specs recalled an Indian story his uncle had told him of the treachery of the Redskins, and recited it to Bunny with evident relish. Then they took up their steady march once more.

Somewhere between one and two they emerged suddenly into a clearing, with a cornfield waving before them, and a comfortable, squat house at the far side. Although neither had ever seen it before, they knew this must be the home of Mr. Robinson, who owned the land upon which Mammoth Mound had been erected.

Mr. Robinson himself was mending a fence. He

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was a pleasant-faced man of the type boys like and trust, and he shook hands cordially with both of the scouts.

"Yes, indeed, you may go over to Mammoth Mound," he told them. "It lies yonder behind that grove of trees. And dig to your heart's content. I guess you'll find some relics of the old Indian days."

"Are there any Braves about now?" asked Specs suddenly.

"Braves?" Mr. Robinson was plainly puzzled. "Oh, I see; you mean Indians. No, I never saw any. I don't suppose there's been an Indian on this land for forty years. Anyhow, you scouts are soldiers, fighting folks, aren't you?"

Then they had to explain to the man, as they frequently did to others, that the Boy Scout movement was not a military organization, but that it had been created to gather the red-blooded boys of the country into a vast army that stood for peace and character-building. After this, Mr. Robinson was more cordial than ever, and asked a hundred questions, and insisted upon loaning them spades to dig with, and even promised to visit their new club-house when he came to town the next time. So when they left him they were at peace with the world.

Mammoth Mound was a gigantic uprearing of

earth, smoothed down evenly on the sides and flat on top, for all the world like a great loaf of bread-dough in the pan. After making a rough outline of it, Bunny selected a promising spot on the side and began to dig. Specs pattered about a long time, only to come back to his first choice of ground, close to his companion's.

It was hot work, and there was no real promise of success. But Bunny was a diligent, persistent toiler at any task he tackled, and Specs was fired into an initial activity by the zest of the adventure. And at last, just when they were both becoming discouraged, the former's spade struck something hard. Frantic digging uncovered a round stone mortar.

Wild horses could not have stopped them now. Whereas they had worked steadily before, they now dug with the frenzy of miners who have uncovered a pay-streak of yellow gold. Nor was the task in vain. Specs shortly brought to light an irregular piece of flint. Two minutes later Bunny uncovered a perfect arrow-head.

"Some Indian made that," he told Specs impressively.

"I wonder when." The other moved nervously. "You don't suppose — Listen!"

They had been digging on the gentle slope of the

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mound. Now, as they paused, they heard a sound. It was an unintelligible murmur, but it was undoubtedly a human voice. On the far side of the mound, somebody had spoken.

Above them, on the very edge of the flat top, grew a clump of bushes. As cautiously and as silently as any old-time scout of the plains might have crawled, Specs wriggled up to their shelter. He leaned forward, parting the leaves before his face. Then, as Bunny watched with choking breath, the other signaled for him to come up.

Indians! Ridiculous, yes; there were none in that part of the country. Impossible, yes; Mr. Robinson had said that forty years had passed since one set foot on his land. And yet, ridiculous and impossible as it might sound, Bunny knew instinctively there were Indians close to them at that very minute.

Not to be outdone by Specs, either in courage or in silent movement, he edged up the slope, an inch at a time. When he had reached Specs' side, his eyes followed the boy's pointing finger.

Perhaps fifty feet from them, hugging the weeds and bushes as he sped forward in a low crouch, was a human figure. It was an Indian. There were smears of paint on his face. There were feathers rising from his bound head.

Neither of the boys spoke. Both lay flat on their stomachs, breathing in queer little gasps. The sight was so astounding that Bunny rubbed his eyes, half convinced that he was dreaming. A sharp wrench of his arm by Specs made him look again.

Silently, stealthily, like ghosts emerging from a fog, came a second Indian, a third, a fourth, a fifth — scores of them, it seemed to the dazed and frightened Bunny. Each and every one was in full war-paint.

How they scrambled without a sound to the bottom of the slope, neither boy remembered afterward. But they did it somehow. At the base of the terrace, Bunny put his mouth close to Specs' ear.

"We must get away — quick!" he said. "Walk on your tiptoes, so you won't leave much of a trail. We don't want to be tracked."

Specs nodded. Together they picked their way from the mound, striving to step on hard ground, on rocks, on sticks, on tree-limbs, that they might leave no marks. But once they reached the protection of the woods, they broke into a run, forgetting everything except a mad desire to get as far from the spot as possible.

A mile away, exhausted and winded, they flung themselves on the ground. For a long time they lay

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there, breathing hard from their run. Then Bunny shook his head savagely.

"What did you see?" he demanded, with some forlorn hope that his eyes had played him false.

"Indians!" shrilled Specs. "Indians! Hundreds and hundreds of them."

"Not that many," denied the honest Bunny. "But they were Indians, all right. I thought maybe — Oh!"

"What is it? Where?" Specs was on his feet in an instant, whirling about to face the danger.

"I just remembered," moaned Bunny. "I — I couldn't be expected to think of them, could I? We — left — our — spades — on — the — mound!"

"They can have them."

"But they weren't ours, Specs. We borrowed them from Mr. Robinson, you know, and we promised him we would bring them back before we hiked to town again."

"But —"

"We're going to keep our word," said Bunny grimly.

"You don't mean —"

"We're going back and get them."

"We're not," shouted Specs. "No, sir, not in a thousand years."

Bunny looked at his companion. There was nothing he wanted to do less than retrace his steps to Mammoth Mound at that time, but Specs' very stubbornness gave him fresh determination.

"Specs," he said quietly, "I took this hike to qualify as a first-class scout, didn't I? That means I must obey the law about being trustworthy. You remember, too, what Mr. Stanton told us about making it a test worthy of a true scout. We promised Mr. Robinson to return the spades before we left, and — and we're going to do it!"

"We're not," declared Specs again. But this time there were signs of yielding in his voice.

"Yes, we are. Come on." Without looking back, he walked in the direction of Mammoth Mound. For a long minute, which put his courage fairly to the test, he heard nothing of Specs. Then, coming closer, as if the other were following him on a dog-trot, he caught the footfalls of his companion.

"I think," said Specs' voice just behind him, "that you're a chump, Bunny Payton, but I — I don't want you to go back and get killed alone. Only — let's be careful."

They were. When they came in sight of the mound for the second time that day, they were effectually screened from observation by any Indian who might

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be prowling about. Nor was their guarded advance one calculated to give warning to any lurking Red-skin.

As a matter of sober truth, however, there were no Indians to be seen. The mound lay basking in the afternoon sun, peaceful and deserted on every side. The spades were where they had left them. There was no sign of life in any direction.

"But we saw them," protested Bunny, pushing back his damp hair. "Or — did we?"

"Sure we saw them," affirmed Specs. "Come on, let's get away from here."

Somewhat against his will, for he was now uncertain as to what he really had seen, Bunny allowed himself to be dragged away. Specs headed him straight for the Robinson farmhouse. Luckily, as they wanted to avoid talking about the matter at all without thinking it over, Mr. Robinson was nowhere to be seen. So they propped the two spades against the door of his barn and slipped away.

"Now," remarked Specs firmly, "we're going home, and we're going home in a hurry, too. I — I've had about all the excitement I need for one day. All those Indians —"

"I wonder if they were Indians, though. If there was any way of making sure —"

“Want to track 'em to their wigwams?” asked Specs hotly. “Want to go up and say: ‘I’m next, Chief; scalp me’?”

“That’s it — the tracks, I mean,” announced Bunny triumphantly. “I’m going back to the mound and look for tracks. If I can’t find any, I’ll know there weren’t any Indians. Come on, Specs.”

“Not me! I won’t do it!” There was no doubting the finality of his tone this time. “I won’t budge a step nearer Mammouth Mound than right here where I stand.”

Bunny hesitated. It took courage to make the trip alone, but his practical mind told him he would never be certain till he had the proof. People dreamed things, and imagined things, and —

“All right,” he said suddenly, “you stay here. I’ll go alone.”

As Specs turned to protest, Bunny slipped away. With a sigh, half admiration, half contempt, the other squatted down and waited. A quarter of an hour later Bunny was back.

“Well?”

“They were there, Specs. Along the path they followed, I found footprints, scores and scores of them, each one made by a moccasin. Nobody wears moccasins but —”

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“They were Indians,” said Specs solemnly.

“They were Indians,” agreed Bunny even more solemnly.

CHAPTER XVII

IF HE WERE TO LIE —

On the following Monday afternoon, accompanied by the protesting Specs, Bunny called at Mr. Stanton's offices. He handed over his written account of the trip, and sat stiffly in one of the straight-backed chairs while the man read it.

"Good!" said the scout master, nodding approvingly as he finished the introduction. "That's an excellent way to begin." He read another page. "Yes, that's fine! You observed carefully, and you recorded with a lot of skill." By this time, he was skimming rapidly through the manuscript. Specs wriggled uncomfortably. Bunny watched with fascinated eyes as the man turned to the final page.

Until the last paragraph, Mr. Stanton's expression was one of satisfaction and congratulation. Here, suddenly, it altered to amazement. For he read:

"I looked over the mound and saw an Indian. I watched. Others came along, one behind the other,

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but I could not count them all. After a while, though, I went back and looked at the tracks in the soft earth. They were made by moccasins, which only an Indian wears."

"H'm!" said Scout Master Stanton. "H'm! What's this, Bunny? The account was to be merely true, without any fiction in it at all." There was a big-leaded blue pencil on his desk. Looking at the boy with twinkling eyes, he drew it through the final sentences.

"But I saw some Indians," declared Bunny, with just a suspicion of sullenness in his voice. "I — we both saw them, didn't we, Specs?"

"We did; honest Injun, we did, Mr. Stanton."

"Oh, come, come, boys! Don't keep up a joke too long. Shall I consider this final paragraph out of the account, Bunny?"

"If you want to, sir; only — only I saw Indians."

"So did I," put in Specs loyally.

The scout master's brow wrinkled. There was something irritating about their sober insistence. He shut his lips a little tighter and looked squarely into their faces. Before his steady gaze, their eyes wavered and fell.

"There are no Indians in this part of the country, of course," he told them kindly. "I don't suppose

there's been an Indian here for forty or fifty years. So —”

“We saw some Saturday,” repeated Bunny doggedly.

“Out at Mammouth Mound,” contributed Specs.

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Mr. Stanton. The thing was becoming serious. “You can't have seen what wasn't there. Don't you think this joke has gone far enough?”

“It's no joke, sir.”

“We saw them.”

Mr. Stanton lifted a paper-weight from his desk. Before he spoke, he turned it over and over, as if it were an object he was studying for the first time. Then he said:

“Bunny, I've talked to you once or twice about the matter of trustworthiness. Usually I've done it because you didn't perform exactly some task. But this is a little different. I want you to repeat the first scout law.”

“‘A scout is trustworthy,’” began the boy in a low voice. “‘A scout's honor is to be trusted. If he were to violate his honor by telling a lie —’”

“Now,” interrupted Mr. Stanton, “I am going to ask you a question. Think well before you answer it. Did you really see some Indians Saturday?”

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It seemed to Bunny that he was suddenly stricken dumb. Through his brain raced the final words of the first scout law, the penalty for telling a lie, "— he may be directed to hand over his scout badge." He stole a glance at Specs, whose face had gone very white. Mr. Stanton waited patiently. When he had given the boy plenty of time to answer, however, he repeated his question.

"If you please, sir," quavered Bunny miserably, "I'd like to talk with Specs before I say yes or no; I'd like to talk with him alone, if you don't mind."

"Very well," agreed the scout master, looking at his watch. "I shall leave you two here in my office for ten minutes while I walk around the block. At the end of that time, I shall come back here and ask you again. Then, if you confess you did not see any Indians, and tell me you were merely joking, you may consider the matter forgotten. But—" And he chopped short the implied threat with a snap of his teeth, and went out the door.

Left alone, the two boys looked hopelessly at each other. Specs was the first to speak.

"He'll ask me, too," he said. "Listen, Bunny; maybe we didn't really see them."

"But we did. I saw them, you saw them, and I examined the tracks."

“He won’t believe us,” Specs argued, “and if we stick to the tru—to our stories—Let’s not, Bunny; let’s tell him you were only joking; let’s —”

“Let’s not. We’re going to tell the truth, Specs, no matter how much it hurts. Why, I’d rather not be a scout at all than be one who lied. You —”

“Oh, I know. I didn’t mean it. We’ve got to stick to the story, of course. I thought maybe—I don’t know what I thought. I wish I had never seen the old mound!”

Bunny nodded. For five long minutes, ticked off by a solemn-faced clock on the wall, they sat silent, looking about the office, avoiding each other’s eyes, and shuffling their feet uneasily. When the door opened suddenly to admit Mr. Stanton, both jumped as if the sound were a rifle shot.

“Now, Bunny,” the man said abruptly, “did you really see Indians Saturday?”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“Specs?”

“Yes, sir, I did, too.”

Mr. Stanton did a queer thing. Just when they expected him to tell how he was to punish them, he went over to the boys and threw an arm protectingly about the shoulder of each. Both Bunny and Specs opened and shut their eyes several times.

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"Boys," the scout master said earnestly, "I want to believe you. I think I do. But it's going to be hard; very, very hard. When I went out that door ten minutes ago, I told myself that if you still held to your wild tale upon my return, I should ask you to hand over your scout badges. I'm not going to, though—not yet. I'm telling myself that there's some horrible mistake about it all, and that you are sincere in believing you saw Indians. I can't imagine any explanation, but I shall wait a while before I pass judgment. A scout, you know, is friend to all; a scout master must be doubly so. Good-by."

The week that followed was the dreariest Bunny and Specs had ever known. Had it not been for the staunchly loyal attitude of Mr. Stanton, there is no telling what they might have done. Even so, it seemed they were to be convicted of telling an untruth.

On Wednesday, for example, they learned from Judge that the scout master had driven out to Mammoth Mound. Judge did not know why, but the two under suspicion realized that it was to search for the footprints Bunny claimed to have seen, and to talk with Mr. Robinson. Their hopes ran high until Mr. Stanton himself told them a light rain in that vicinity had destroyed any tracks that might have been there. Mr. Robinson was away from home.

On Thursday Roundy came to them with an awkward apology for attempting to frighten them by talking about Indians. He was obviously uncertain as to what harm he had wrought, but the incident served to show that the scout master was investigating each detail of the affair.

Thursday evening Bunny met Mr. Stanton on the street. The man greeted him cordially enough, but when Bunny asked if there was anything new about their hike the week before, he merely shook his head. The regular meeting of the patrol was on Friday nights.

“Shall I come, sir?” asked the boy doubtfully.

“Of course. Until I ask for your badge, I want you to serve your patrol faithfully. But I wish —”

So he and Specs went to the meeting, much as they would have liked to stay away. By this time, too, the other scouts were aware that something was decidedly wrong. They looked curiously at Specs and Bunny, and they hung upon each speech of Mr. Stanton's as if waiting for the explanation.

Although the scout master had no idea of revealing the trouble, he realized it was going to be hard to get through the routine business of the meeting; for all the fellows knew that Bunny had taken the hike as the final test for qualifying as a first-class scout, and that

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his promotion was to have been announced to-night. Mr. Stanton decided to say the advancement would be taken up at the next meeting. He cleared his throat.

Somebody knocked on the door. Handy, who was nearest, threw it open and said: "Come in, sir." A man stepped into the club-house.

"Why — why, it's Robinson," whispered Bunny to Specs, hardly knowing whether to be sorry or glad.

"Couldn't find his spades, probably," answered Specs gloomily, "and wants to have us searched."

"I met two of your scouts the other day," the visitor told Mr. Stanton, "and I don't mind saying I liked them so well that I promised to call at the club-house the next time I came to town. I'd like to know all about the movement."

Mr. Stanton was glad of the interruption. He showed Mr. Robinson the pennants on the wall, the merit badges the various scouts had won, and had him shake hands with each of the boys. Then he told something of the ideals of the Boy Scouts of America; and, before the visitor quite realized it himself, Mr. Robinson was making a speech.

"In my day," he concluded, "we didn't have Boy Scouts. I wish we had. But I'm not going to cry over spilt milk; I'm going to get better acquainted with you boys. Coming into town to-day, I was turn-

ing over in my mind how I might do it, and it came to me all at once. There's going to be a big moving picture shown over in Harrison City shortly, and if your scout master doesn't object, I'll take you all over in my hay-rack, nicely bedded down from the mow."

"There will be no objection," said Mr. Stanton a little absently, "if the subject is one that will prove helpful or educational." He was wondering if Bunny and Specs would be members of the Black Eagle Patrol by that time.

"Well, as I understand it, the picture is to be historical, with scenes from the time of the first settlers in this part of the country right down to the present time. Some of the pictures were taken on my land. One shows an Indian massacre near Mammouth Mound. They took that picture last week, with a whole parcel of made-up Indians; the camera chap said I could bring anybody I liked to Harrison City to see it."

Mr. Stanton sat up very straight. A slow smile grew upon his face.

"When was this picture taken, did you say, Mr. Robinson?"

"Last Saturday afternoon. I didn't know it till night myself, but I guess they didn't tear up my land any. I'll confess," he added a little sheepishly, "I was some set back to see a file of Indians come to the

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house, all toggled up with feathers and war-paint. I couldn't believe I was seeing right until they explained they were moving picture actors. May I take your boys to Harrison City, Mr. Stanton?"

"Most certainly."

All the scouts talked excitedly at once. Only one fragment of conversation is worth recording.

"I suppose we might as well go along, Bunny," said Specs, "but it won't be new to us. We've seen those moving picture actors once."

The meeting concluded with the routine business of advancing Bunny Payton to the rank of first-class scout. As Mr. Stanton put it, he had passed the final test of the qualifying hike with the highest honors.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RACE AND A PROVERB

“George!”

Bunny stopped at the gate as his aunt appeared in the doorway.

“Didn’t you ask me to remind you of something?”

Bunny laughed. “You mean the shoe?”

His aunt laughed, too, because it had become a joke between them. “Yes, I mean the shoe.”

Bunny wavered. “I’ll take it next time,” he said.

“That’s what you promised yesterday. If the Boy Scouts ever give a prize for putting off things, I know who will win it.”

Bunny frowned. “Well, you know how it is. He’s the only cobbler in town, and I haven’t exactly wanted to go back since we had that row when he gave me a Canadian quarter.” His face brightened. “Besides, I couldn’t go now. There’s a very important meeting at the club-house. The State Scout Commissioner is to be there.”

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“Run along,” laughed his aunt. “It’s your shoe, not mine. But you remember the proverb: ‘For want of a nail the shoe was lost.’”

“Not this one,” Bunny retorted with a smile. “This shoe has a rubber sole, and there aren’t any nails in it.”

But as he went down the road at a dog-trot, he found he was secretly disgusted with himself. He was painfully aware that he had a tendency to put off disagreeable jobs, and that, as in the present case, the excuse was often a flimsy one. To-day, for example, he contented himself by arguing that it didn’t matter particularly whether the leather backing which covered his heel was sewed or not, because the athletic competitions were over. The Black Eagle Patrol had held its field day a week before.

Besides, it was really a most important meeting to which he was hurrying. The State Boy Scout Commissioner was expected to announce just how well they had done in the various contests, and just how high the committee ranked them. They hoped, of course, that their patrol would be one of the two that were to be sent to the tournament at Elkana, but they had heard disquieting rumors about the wonderful efficiency of the Beavers of Swamp Lake, the Panthers of Elkana, the Ravens of Millertown, and several others.

"We've won, of course," S. S. was saying when Bunny entered the club-house. "You don't suppose the head man in the State would come here to tell us we'd lost, do you?"

Judge did not seem quite so sure.

"If we have lost," Specs said aggrievedly, "it's probably because of the broad jump. If you'd just waited till I ran home and put on my tennis shoes, I could have beaten Bi a mile and made some sort of a record."

"It's your own fault," Judge remarked drily. "You knew all about it beforehand. We couldn't stop after we had the judges there. Why didn't you bring your tennis shoes with you?"

"Never you mind why," Specs grumbled. "I could have beaten Bi, I tell you, if you had waited for me to get my right shoes."

The entrance of Mr. Porter, the State Commissioner, cut short Judge's answer to this complaint. He was a man of middle age, but he walked with the springy step of a boy, and he suggested, somehow, the outdoor world.

"You all want to hear the results of the field meets held by the patrols of this State during the last four weeks," he began briskly. "They proved highly interesting. It was a close race."

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"Did we win?" demanded Nap, apparently quite unaware that he had put his thought into words.

Mr. Porter merely smiled. "The system of marking that was used is too complicated to explain in this short time, but you will understand me when I say we rated each patrol in such a way that it received 1,000 if perfect in the various tests of scoutcraft, woodcraft, campcraft, tracking and trailing and signaling, first aid and life saving, and various athletic events. Of course, there were no perfect patrols. But the Fox Patrol of Vanceville, the Panthers of Elkana, and your own Black Eagles all stood over 850."

"Who won?" gasped Specs.

"The Fox Patrol received a rating of 876; strange to say, the Black Eagles and the Panthers were tied with 894. In accordance with the offer made by Mr. Sefton, these two latter will compete in the special tournament at Elkana, provided both are satisfied with the events."

It was Bi who cheered first, and Bi's voice was loud. But the roar of delight that came from the others drowned it altogether. Everybody thumped everybody else on the back. Even Specs shared in the enthusiasm, although he bewailed the fact that the Black Eagle Patrol might have won the highest rating if he

had been given time to get his tennis shoes for the broad jump.

“The tournament at Elkana,” continued Mr. Porter when he could make himself heard again, “is to consist of two main events. One will be a baseball game, as announced some months ago by Mr. Sefton’s newspaper. The other will be a medley relay race. If one patrol wins both of these events, it will be awarded the special medal and then taken on the trip to New York City. On the contrary, if each patrol wins one event, the tie will be broken by contests not to be announced till that day.”

“What’s a medley relay race?” demanded Specs.

“The idea is Mr. Sefton’s,” explained the commissioner. “Each team is to be made up of the entire eight boys of the patrol. The first two to meet in competition are to follow made trails to a spot where each will be given a different message. They will make fires by rubbing sticks, melt wax, seal the messages, and turn them over to the second members of the teams, who will compete in a cross-country run. The third pair will swim to an island in Clear Lake, where the next contestants will await them in canoes. These boys will paddle to the foot of a steep hill on the mainland, there turning the messages over to their mates of the fifth relay, who will climb to the summit. The

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sixth bandages the seventh, who are supposed to be disabled, and who then signal the messages by any code they choose to the eighth pair. The final relay is the 100-yard dash. Do you vote to accept the conditions of the race?"

They would and did. To have heard their noisy approval of the unique relay, one might have thought it framed for their special benefit. Only Specs objected; he wanted a jump put in it, and detailed once more how he might have beaten Bi and set a new record if the judges had only waited for him to get his tennis shoes. But this time Mr. Stanton put a stop to him.

"Specs," he said severely, "you must quit that sort of thing. If you're licked, don't whine or grumble. When you look for excuses, you're not a good sportsman or a good Boy Scout. To take your defeats cheerfully and smile is the real test, after all."

It was a bit of advice much needed, not alone by Specs, but by several other members of the patrol. Bunny took it to heart quite as much as anybody else.

During the next few days following the departure of Commissioner Porter, the scouts busied themselves trying to decide which specialty each should attempt. There was no doubt as to the swimming lap; Roundy was far and away the best swimmer of the eight. S.

S. was also chosen unanimously for the first aid stunt. Handy had a knack of paddling that pointed clearly to his selection as canoeist.

Bi challenged Judge's right to run in the cross-country lap, but in the trial race the latter beat him decisively. As a result, Bi was assigned to run the fourth relay. This, as Mr. Stanton had been informed, was to consist of climbing a steep and difficult hill, a job for which Bi was exactly suited.

Specs was content to have the glory of finishing the relay till he discovered that part of the task of the first boy up would be to kindle a fire without the use of matches. Being proud of his ability in this line, he challenged Nap, only to be badly distanced. Nobody listened as he tried to explain his defeat.

It was after this match that Bunny asked permission to race Specs for the honor of running in the final dash of the relay.

Mr. Stanton seemed puzzled. "But I thought you were satisfied with the signaling," he said.

"Specs does that as well as I do," explained Bunny. "So does Judge, and so do Nap and Handy."

"But you can't beat Specs in the dashes. Why, on our field day he beat you in both."

Bunny nodded. "I know," he said. "I don't want you to think I am making excuses when I say I

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had a sore foot then, but I did. I think I'm a better runner than Specs, and I want to race him."

Mr. Stanton considered silently. "Well," he said at last, "this is Saturday morning. You look up Specs, and we'll have the race over with at once — if he's willing."

Specs was willing; more than that, he was anxious. "Sure," he consented, "I'll run you now. Do you really think you can beat me, Bunny? Well, you'll think different when we get to going. Why, I've never run as fast as I could."

It happened that the cinder track was impossible that morning. A heavy rain had washed tiny valleys in one section, and the cinders were now being re-bedded.

"We'll try going around the Anvers place," decided Mr. Stanton after some discussion. "Run up Willis Court to Beechnut Street, and then about fifty yards over, and down Maple. That makes two turns, but the going is perfectly level, and it gives me a chance to be at both the start and finish."

As Bunny crouched, waiting for the pistol shot, he planned his race. Specs could lead up the Court to the first turn; then he would catch him on Beechnut Street, and try to increase the lead as much as possible down the home-stretch. He was confident that be-

fore he completed that U-shaped course he would be far to the front. His foot was well again. On even terms, he could show Specs the color of his flying heels.

“Get set!”

Bunny humped his back into position. A sudden misgiving made him press his toes harder into the starting holes he had dug. One shoe sagged loosely at the heel — the rubber-soled shoe that had never gone to the cobbler! Suppose —

“*Bang!*”

The two boys started together. Specs plainly had no intention of being headed, which fitted in very well with Bunny's program. So, after an initial sprint to start the other off at a good clip, he dropped behind. But he did not drop behind any farther than was absolutely necessary. He merely shifted to a position some six feet to the rear, setting his legs twinkling to Specs' tune. They ran in perfect unison, quite as if propelled by the same piston rod.

Bunny began to feel better. The tension that had worried him before the start was relaxing. As he ran, he knew he was the better of the two. When he started his sprint, he expected to overtake his rival with hardly an effort.

Nearing the turn, his heart jumped as an uncom-

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fortable thought forced its way into his consciousness. The shoe on his right foot was beginning to work free. The rip was widening. With every step, the heel scraped up and down.

He became aware suddenly that he was dropping behind a little. In thinking of the shoe, he had taken his attention off his running. He spurred to catch up.

They made the corner with a rush; it was time now to begin his finishing sprint. Clutching tighter his pair of wooden grips, he started to crawl up on the outside of Specs. But Specs saw the maneuver and increased his own speed. They were going it hard. Bunny had forgotten all about the shoe in his anxiety to round the home-stretch in the lead.

Now it was thirty yards to the Maple Street turn — now twenty. Bunny was almost even with Specs. He was gaining fast, just as he had known he would. Then, when he was about to put on the last ounce of steam, something seemed to give way. He found himself sprawling on the ground.

He knew at once what had happened. The loosened shoe had caught on a bit of stone, tripping him and sending him to his hands and knees. But he was not hurt. Luckier yet, the fall had jammed the faulty shoe more firmly upon his foot.

Unaware of the accident, Specs had disappeared

around the corner. Bunny jumped up and threw all his energy into what he felt must prove a hopeless race. Even though he lost, however, he resolved to do his best.

How he ran! He thought of just one thing, and that thing was the flying figure ahead of him. A stubborn determination lent his feet wings. His strides were longer than ever before; he seemed to cover the ground more easily. Perhaps — he hardly dared hope — perhaps, after all, it was not Specs' race yet.

He must catch him! That was it! Catch him! Catch! He must catch Specs!

He felt his strength going fast. His legs seemed to be some other fellow's. That hoarse puffing couldn't be his breathing, could it? Maybe it was Specs'. Where was Specs, anyhow?

Ahead of him, he could see Mr. Stanton, watch in hand. He knew they were close to the finishing line, and he summoned all that was left of his skill and power for one last spurt. He put his whole body into every stride. He was gaining now — gaining — close behind — even — no, not quite! Specs was still ahead. Now they were breast and breast! Now — He threw up his arms. A piece of red yarn, broken, fluttered to the ground. He had touched it first. He had won.

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Breathing hard, he waited for Mr. Stanton's congratulations.

"Bunny," said the scout master, "you're a much better runner than I thought. Specs only beat you by about five inches, and if you'd thrown yourself forward at the end — if you hadn't finished a little carelessly — you might have made it less. Now, if you signal in the big relay race as well as you ran to-day, you'll beat your man."

Bunny frowned, staring at the ground. He hadn't won, then; he had been beaten. He looked at his hands. One palm was bleeding a little where a sharp bit of gravel had cut it. He wanted to explain that he had fallen, that if he had worn another pair of shoes —

Then he remembered what Mr. Stanton had said to Specs that day about winning and losing. With an effort, he smoothed the frowning creases from his face. He held out his hand.

"It was a great race, Specs," he smiled, "and I'm glad you won."

He did not tell the whole story to anybody, not even to his aunt. When she asked him why he hung a horseshoe nail from the head of his bed, he answered:

"That's to remind me that for the want of a nail

the shoe was lost — and all the rest of it. But it's mostly a reminder that nothing like that is ever going to happen to me again."

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIZZLED NINTH INNING

About the first person Bunny spied in Elkana on the day of the tournament was Molly Sefton.

"Dad says you're the captain of the Black Eagle ball team," she began abruptly. "Are you?"

"Yes-s." For some reason, Bunny felt like apologizing. "You see, the fellows insisted. They thought I knew more about baseball than they did and —"

"You beat those Panthers," ordered Molly. "I hate them because they think they're so good at everything. They need to have the conceit taken out of them. You beat them. Are you a good batter?"

"I hit over .300," said Bunny proudly. "I — Oh, I forgot. You're only a girl; you don't know what that means."

"Don't I, though? I'm a fan, even if I am a girl. I'll be at the game. And let me tell you, Bunny, when you come up to bat in the ninth, with the score tied, and two out, and then slam out a home run, nobody in that old grand-stand will yell louder or longer than

I will — unless it's your Uncle Henry. If there's one thing in the world he loves, it's baseball."

"He's proud because I'm captain of the team," the boy confessed. "He says it's my chance to show the stuff that's in me by winning the game for my patrol."

"Of course it is," agreed Molly heartily. "That's what you'll do when you set off the fireworks in the ninth with that clean-up hit."

"I'll try — hard!"

"You'd better. What kind of a game do you think it will be if the ninth inning fizzles? You'd better try, Bunny Payton."

When he gave Bi his final instructions just before the game, he was still thinking of what the girl had said.

"I want you to pitch your head off, Bi," he told the big fellow. "We've simply got to win this game."

"I know," declared Bi solemnly; "it means a strangle-hold on the tournament."

"Because," went on Bunny, quite as if the other had not spoken, "because you see, Bi, this is the first chance I've had to show what I can do. But you must do your share; I can't win alone."

"Of course not," said the Black Eagle pitcher,

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Afterwards, as Bunny recalled the talk, he was conscious that Bi had looked at him a little queerly.

They spun a coin to see which team should bat first. Bunny won, and elected to take the field and allow the Panthers to step up to the plate. The batting order and playing positions of the Black Eagle Patrol nine were as follows:

1. S. S., left field.
2. Specs, shortstop.
3. Judge, catcher.
4. Bunny, second base.
5. Handy, third base.
6. Roundy, first base.
7. Nap, center field.
8. Anvers, right field.
9. Bi, pitcher.

The game began. Bunny trotted to his position at second, and Bi went out to the mound. The first Panther batter stepped up to the plate, swung futilely three times, and wandered angrily back to the bench. So did the second and third. For Bi was at his best to-day, pitching with dazzling speed and a perfect control that enabled him to cut the corners of the plate.

Then the Black Eagles came in to bat. The Lakeville fans in the grand-stand applauded loudly. Mr.

Stanton was there, of course, and Mr. Sawyer, to say nothing of Farmer Benton, Miser Meacham, Mr. Robinson, and several others. Molly Sefton clapped her hands, too.

But it was not a promising inning. S. S. grounded out to the first baseman. Specs fanned, disputing the last strike with the umpire. Judge popped a little fly to short. On the bench, Bunny leaned forward nervously, clenching his fists.

“I’ll get a hit — sure!” he told himself.

But in the second inning, when he led off, he whiffed ignominiously. As he walked away from the plate, he glanced up into the grand-stand, where his uncle and Molly Sefton sat side by side. Bunny told himself bitterly that he was impressing them — but not in the way he had hoped.

After the first inning or two, the game settled down into a stubborn pitchers’ battle. Deek, left-hander, or “southpaw,” was on the mound for the Panthers, and his awkward delivery baffled the visitors. But Bi, too, on his mettle to-day, was no less effective. To the spectators, and even to the players themselves, it seemed the game might go on indefinitely to a scoreless tie.

The break came in the first half of the ninth inning. A walked batter, a bad infield error by Specs, and one

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clean hit, inserted just where it did the most damage, sent a Panther over the plate.

"They haven't beaten us yet," said Bunny grimly, as the Black Eagles came in to bat. "Who's up, anyhow? You, Specs? Well, you get on, and I'll bring you home with a hit over the fence."

"But you don't bat after Specs," objected S. S. querulously.

"I bat this inning, don't I?" snapped Bunny. The strain was making him irritable. "And if there's anybody on the bases when I get my clean-up wallop, we'll win. Get out there, Specs, and do something."

And Specs did. Meeting the first pitched ball flush on the nose, he drove out a clean single. Then Judge marched up to the plate, swinging two bats, to make the final one he retained seem proportionately lighter. The tiny group of Lakeville fans were cheering wildly by this time, and their voices rose to shrieks of frantic delight as Judge poked a Texas-leaguer over short, sending Specs to second and perching safely on first himself.

Back on the bench, Bunny thought quickly. It was in such a situation as this that his superior baseball knowledge really counted. "Two on and nobody out," he told himself. "It's good baseball to sacrifice them along to second and third. Then a double, or

even a long single, will win the game for us." Aloud he said: "All right, Handy; bunt toward third to pull in that baseman. Play the sacrifice game."

Handy did not move. Bi turned a wondering face toward Bunny. Out on the diamond, the umpire moved about impatiently.

"Handy isn't up now," said Bi. "He follows you. It's your turn."

"Why, yes, sure. I — I'd lost track," said Bunny awkwardly. As a matter of fact, he had been so deep in his technical baseball problem that he had forgotten the batting order. "I'm up, Bi; you're right."

As he walked from the bench to the plate, the Lakeville fans, who had quieted as the game halted, greeted Captain Bunny with a roar of applause.

"Touch all the bases as you go round," boomed his Uncle Henry's voice.

"Now the fireworks!" It was Molly Sefton's cry. "We don't want them to sizzle, remember!"

Bunny smiled up at them. Down in his heart, all at once, he felt confident that he could smash out a long hit; no, more than that, a triple or a homer that would win the game then and there, and make him a hero in the eyes of everybody — not forgetting Uncle Henry and Molly. Why, it was almost like a story — ninth inning, two on bases, two runs needed to win,

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and the hero at bat. He threw back his shoulders cockily.

"Two on and nobody out," he told himself as he stepped up to the plate. And then, in a flash, came the solution of the problem, just as he had worked it out back on the bench a minute before. Let's see, what had he told himself? "It's good baseball to sacrifice them to second and third."

But he had supposed Handy was next at bat when he had decided that way. His case was different. This was his big opportunity to prove the stuff that was in him. He must win the game; he must smash out that screaming hit; he must keep this ninth inning from fizzling. With Uncle Henry and Molly Sefton watching, why should he sacrifice his chance?

Deek streaked over a fast, straight ball that cut the heart of the plate. Still turning the problem over in his mind, Bunny watched it go by without offering at it.

"Strike!" said the umpire.

Another ball sang its way tauntingly to the catcher's glove. Bunny held his breath till the umpire gave his decision. If this proved a second strike, the thing would be decided for him. For it would be bad baseball, of course, to attempt to bunt on the third strike.

"Ball!" decided the official.

Out in the pitcher's box, Deek wound up for his third delivery. Bunny watched him with fascinated eyes, gripping hard the bat in his hands. Then, abruptly, his fingers relaxed, slipping up the handle a little.

Deek pitched. As the ball neared him, Bunny held out his bat, clasped loosely, and, without swinging at all, allowed the whistling white sphere to meet it. Just at the end, he pulled the bat around toward third.

The bunt trickled down the base line. Like an eagle swooping for a choice morsel, Deek plucked the ball from the grass and whipped it to first. Bunny was out by six feet, but Specs was on third now and Judge on second. The captain of the Black Eagle ball team had played the sacrifice game perfectly.

The sudden stilling of the noise in the stands cut Bunny like a knife. Following the soft *plumph* as bat and ball met, he had caught the first gasps of amazement and hope as the ball was being fielded. Then came the long-drawn "Oh-h-h!" of disapproval and disappointment, tailing off to absolute silence through a brief buzz of comment. It was as if the Lakeville fans' proxy had failed them in the crisis.

As if to make matters worse, Handy fanned. There were now two out. Unless Roundy hit safely, the game was lost.

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Roundy cannonaded a shrieking liner to deep right field. Specs scored standing up. Judge and the ball raced for the plate exactly together, apparently reaching it simultaneously. Then, from out the mountain of dust where the runner had slid, came the important word of the umpire's decision:

“— safe!”

The Black Eagle Patrol had won the baseball game and the first event of the tournament.

The Lakeville fans swarmed upon the field. Ignoring completely Bunny and the players on the bench, they rushed for the grinning and happy Roundy. Roundy was the hero. It was Roundy's hit that had won. Even Bunny ran out to him and whacked him upon the shoulder.

“You did it!” he cried. “You won the game for us!”

Roundy looked at him. “Why, no,” he protested. “I only finished out the play. Your sacrifice —”

The shifting fans separated them. As Bunny stood watching, a hand whirled him around. It was Mr. Stanton's.

“I want to congratulate the fellow who won the game,” he said quizzically, looking steadily at Bunny.

Then Mr. Sawyer came up, looking as dejected as if the Black Eagle Patrol had lost. He, too, shook

Bunny's hand, but he did it in a perfunctory way, and his eyes kept wandering out to the place where Roundy was being urged to make a speech.

"I wish you'd hit it out, Bunny," he said finally.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed an indignant voice behind him, which belonged to Molly Sefton. "Why, Bunny won that game by not trying to hit it out. If he'd tried to, he'd probably have banged into a double play, with runners on first and second. Then Handy's out would have been the third, with no runs in. I thought you knew something about baseball, Mr. Sawyer!"

"I hadn't thought of that," confessed Bunny's uncle. "We didn't use this — this sacrifice play in my time."

"Oh, yes, you did, Mr. Sawyer," insisted Scout Master Stanton. "Maybe not in baseball, but in life. And we're playing it to-day, too. The fellow who sacrifices does it, not for his own glory, but for the bigger thing — the victory of the team."

"But it's so — so easy to get yourself put out just to let another runner advance a base."

"Is it? I wonder if you realize how much a boy wants to step up and swing at a pitched ball, and how he has to fight down the temptation to make a hero of himself. It takes brains and courage, let me tell you."

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A new understanding seemed to come to Mr. Sawyer. He whistled softly.

"Bunny," he said, "I don't believe I've congratulated you yet on winning the game. It looks to me as if you were going to turn out a born leader."

"And about five minutes ago," remarked Molly Sefton, "it looked to me as if the fireworks were going to fizzle in the ninth. They did sputter a little, but they went off with a bang after you got them ready, didn't they, Bunny? My, but I'm glad you beat those stuck-up Panthers!"

CHAPTER XX

THE TRAIL BEYOND

The great medley relay race was about to be run. The starting judge had just given his final instructions.

“Do you understand, Black Eagle?”

Nap nodded. The directions were clear. He was to follow the red confetti trail, without diverging from it, to some unknown point at its end. There another judge would turn over to him a written message, a bit of wax, and the scout's own fire-making apparatus. He was to rub the sticks till he produced a flame. He was to melt the wax and seal the message, and he was then to turn it over to the runner of the second relay for his team. Yes, he understood.

“And you, Panther?”

Nap's opponent nodded, too. Except that his trail was of white confetti, he was bound by the same instructions.

“Very well,” the judge said. “I shall start you by counting three slowly, at about this speed, One — two — three. Instead of saying ‘three,’ however, I shall

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fire the pistol. Is that clear to both of you? Ready, then. One — two —”

“Bang!”

The pause before the explosion had been very brief, but Nap's sensitive nerves were raw. As he sprang forward, the first twenty yards of the trail, straight as a pole, seemed to lift to meet him. It was as if he were running lightly out upon the tapering limb of a tree, with the tip a jumping-off place. He dreaded to think of what lay beyond.

The stretch gave way to a gentle curve. Nap took it cautiously, leaning inward and watching with fascinated eyes as his falling feet fanned the scraps of red paper into fluttering motion. They looked like mosquitoes buzzing greedily at his ankles; he wanted to stop and slap at them. But he fought back the desire.

Another straight-away portion of the thin, narrow trail made him think of a tight-rope, and he balanced himself ridiculously with his arms, and put one foot directly in front of the other with each step. It was this jerky way of running that finally cleared his numbed brain. One minute he was feeling gingerly for the red rope on the ground; the next he was laughing as loudly as he could without wasting precious breath. After that, he tucked his nervous imagina-

tion away into some cranny of his mind, and bent low and sprinted forward with all the speed of which he was capable.

His Panther opponent was not in sight. Nap had some dim recollection of having seen him disappear a while ago behind a hill to the left. Anyhow, there was nothing to worry about. The starting judge had made it clear that the two trails, although of equal length, did not run along side by side.

"What I want to do," Nap told himself, "is to run my best and keep to that line of red confetti. I don't have to bother about the other fellow at all. Probably I won't see him again."

But he did.

The red trail wove into the woods and out again; it zigzagged across a broad clearing; it climbed a hill and doubled back to its foot; it writhed and twisted and circled and curved in a fashion that was maddening to a fellow who wanted to go to a certain place in the least possible time. If only there were some way of discovering where that place might be!

Nap came to an open field. The red trail started straight across for once, with no turns or bends to confuse. Relieved, the boy lifted his head to study the lay of the land.

At the other side of the field, running parallel with

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him, was his Panther opponent. He, too, was moving straight ahead. Nap smiled a little at sight of him, wondering if the white trail had been as tantalizing as the red; smiled a little, that is, until he saw something in the grass at his feet. It was a line of white paper confetti; as far ahead as he could see, it wound back and forth across his own trail.

"He's cheating," Nap decided instantly, scowling at the Panther runner. "He knows where the message is, and he's heading straight for it, without paying any attention to his trail. Well, I guess he's smarter than I am. I haven't a chance now of getting there first."

But he did not stop. He followed his red trail to the far side of the field, into the woods again, and through them to another open space. Although he searched carefully with his eyes, he caught no glimpse of the Panther. Here, at least, he was alone.

The trail veered suddenly to the right. As Nap reckoned the points of the compass, that meant due west. He frowned impatiently at the thought of turning aside, for he was confident that the message lay in quite another direction. Despite its many twists and loops up to this time, the trail had been carrying him steadily toward the north.

But he swung about. As he did so, the afternoon sun caught him full in the eyes, blinding him for an

instant. He turned his head away to shield them until he could see clearly again; turned it to the right, which was north. But even yet his vision was dimmed. He fancied he could make out a ragged line of red specks somewhere beyond.

Then, all at once, he understood. The red specks were real. They were scraps of confetti, and they marked a stretch of trail.

His first feeling was of pride in his own foresight. "I knew it," he said. "I knew my trail must double back this way sooner or later. It's probably a long U, with the points of the mouth right here only fifteen or twenty feet apart."

Then, quite unaccountably, he thought of something else. "We want no coaching in this relay," the starter had told him; "we will allow no spectators along the trails. Neither will there be any judges before you reach the place where the message will be handed you."

Nap slowed gradually till he was jogging along at a dog-trot. The sun did not bother him now, but he kept his eyes half closed. As he moved toward the west, he kept watching that twin trail to his right.

He began to figure. Suppose the wide detour wandered a hundred yards or more before it circled the base of the U and came back to this point; that would mean a half minute or longer to cover it at a fast clip.

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It would be a useless waste of time, too, when he could skip across to the other arm of the trail in perhaps a couple of seconds. Two from thirty or forty — or even sixty left a lot. If he gained that much on his opponent, he might start this relay race by giving the Black Eagle Patrol a clean lead. And the fellows sure did want that trip to New York!

Let's see. What was it the starting judge had said? Maybe he could remember the very words. "You are to follow the red confetti trail, without diverging —"

Without diverging! Oh, of course. But the Panther had left the trail at the first favorable opportunity; he had seen him do it. And — well, who was to know if he took a short-cut himself? There were no spectators nor judges to spy upon him.

His trot slowed to a walk. Presently he stopped altogether. For a long moment, while he peered cautiously in every direction, he stood irresolute. Then, with lips pressed hard together and hands clenched determinedly, he reached a decision.

"Napoleon won his battles in his tent, before a single shot had been fired," he told himself doggedly. "Well, here's my chance to win a race before I run to the finish."

CHAPTER XXI

THROUGH FIRE

Four people stood in the open space, all peering intently toward the east. Two men guarded the messages that were to be turned over to the trail-followers upon their arrival. Two boys waited impatiently to continue the race with a cross-country lap against each other.

"They should be here any moment now," said the first official.

"Any moment now," echoed the second, "provided they keep to their trails."

"Are they hard to follow?" It was the boy from the Panther Patrol who asked the question.

"The trails are plainly marked all the way," answered one of the men. "It was not the intention, I believe, to make this first relay a test of woodcraft. It was to be a test of scouts' honor."

Judge Lloyd, who had been chosen by the Black Eagles to represent them in the cross-country run, straightened up with a jerk. A cold fear gripped him.

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Of all the fellows in his patrol, he was least sure of Nap.

“How did they arrange the test?” He tried to speak carelessly, but his voice trembled a little.

“There’s a field back there a bit,” the official explained readily, “across which the two trails run parallel, although far apart. Each is as straight as a die. But, looping back and forth over the red one, is a curving line of white confetti; and, looping back and forth over the white one, is a curving line of red confetti. These winding trails, of course, are false.”

“But I don’t understand yet,” Judge said.

“Wait. You will presently. It was calculated that the two competing runners were almost certain to see each other in this field. Now, the natural thought of each would be that the other, in cutting straight across, was not holding to his trail, which apparently looped repeatedly over his own. Is that clear?”

“Yes, but —”

“Farther along the real red confetti trail turns abruptly to the right. A little later the white one does the same. Up to this point, you understand, both double back on themselves several times, and both work steadily northward. When either runner, therefore, saw a duplicate of his own red or white trail some twenty yards to his right, or to the north, he

would naturally assume that it was the returning branch of a long loop. Each would argue that the other had already taken advantage of him by cutting across the field and thus leaving his trail, although this was forbidden by the starter."

"And if one of them did turn north, off his trail, I suppose he was to be disqualified?"

"Not at all. There is nobody to watch them along the way; they were told that. But if either attempts to follow the returning trail, he will waste minutes before he discovers that it is merely a false scent, beginning and ending nowhere. We are almost due west from the points where the main trails turn. If one runner comes in several minutes behind the other, we shall — understand!"

Judge nodded and turned away. He was afraid for Nap. Why, he wondered bitterly, must the test of honor crop up in this particular lap of the race? Nap was square enough, of course, but he was inclined to be a little "sharp" when the chance offered. Would he —

"First runner in sight!" boomed an official.

For just a second, hope grew big in Judge. Then the other scout who was waiting with him whooped happily, and one of the men said: "It's the Panther representative."

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Judge recalled the time Nap had attempted to sway young Anvers by offering to allow him to win Miss Pedder's prize for the best composition. He had spoken of that scheme as "strategy," and seen no wrong in it. Expecting him to hold to his trail when —

"Second runner in sight!"

It was Nap, all right. He was behind his Panther opponent, to be sure, but only a few seconds. That meant he could not have swerved from his red trail; meant he had been quite honest in his running. Judge's yell was a welcoming volley of which a cheer-leader might well have been proud.

He did not see the Panther runner arrive and drop before his fire-board; he did not hear what the official told him. He had eyes only for the distant Nap. It seemed to Judge the other would never reach them. He appeared to be standing still — no, he was moving slowly forward — crawling like a snail — walking stiffly — trotting — sprinting — Then, with a last dash, like a burst of gusty wind, he swept into the open space where they stood.

"This way," Judge called, pointing to the other's fire-making apparatus. "Yes, we are allowed to talk, but I mustn't help."

Squatting quickly on the ground, Nap straightened

the pan and notched fire-board with one hand, while he fitted the drill into the pit and clapped on the socket with the other. A single turn of the wrist wrapped the loose thong once about the drill. In another instant he was pulling the bow steadily back and forth, and the pointed stick began boring its way into the soft wood.

“His dust smoking?”

Judge stole a glance toward the Panther. “Not yet. He’s jerking unevenly. How’d you let him get ahead?”

“Stopped once to think of something,” said Nap grimly. He was sawing desperately with the bow and watching the tiny particles of dust run free. “Had a chance to take a short-cut and beat him all hollow. Stopped to think what the scout law said about trustworthiness, that’s all.”

“Oh!” Judge resisted the temptation to thump him on the back, and tell him to let the fire-making go, and say “That-a boy, Nap!” or something equally foolish. He took it out in grinning.

There was no humor in Nap, though. He plodded monotonously. Ground-up wood ran out of the side of the notch in the fire-board to the pan beneath. Brown at first, it darkened gradually to black. A pungent odor filled their nostrils. Smoke rose in tiny

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wreaths. Still he did not stop. He must be sure.

But when the smoke was a cloud pouring from the fire-pan, he tossed aside the bow and began to fan with his hand. A glowing coal winked back at him. This he pressed with some prepared tinder; it smoldered for a tantalizing instant, and then blazed.

“You’ve beaten your own record!” cried Judge exultantly, snapping shut his watch. He risked another glance toward the rival group, fearful of finding the Panther fire-maker gone. But he was not. “And you’ve beaten him, too! He hasn’t a coal yet, and he’s sawing like an old wood-cutter!”

Message and sealing-wax had been placed by Nap’s side. It was the trick of a moment to nurse a hot fire with splinters of fat pine, and to soften the end of the wax-bar. As he picked up the message, Nap looked quizzically at Judge.

“Why the freak envelope?” he asked coolly.

Judge tried to tell him in the same calm, deliberate way. But he couldn’t; he was too excited. “Call it ballast and cravenette,” he said thickly. “Weighed — mean weighted ’th lead to stay in pockets of runners and jumpers. . . . Hurry, Nap! . . . Weighed of — made of oiled paper for swimmer. . . . Quick; his dust is smoking! . . . Flap’s scraped; wax will stick. Make it — make it water-tight. . . . Done?”

Job and explanation were finished at the same time. The hovering official took the message from Nap, assured himself that the work was thorough, and passed it to Judge.

“Go!” he shouted; and the second lap of the relay race began.

Judge was off like a deer. The hope of days had become a reality. He was ahead, well ahead, of his opponent. He could select his jumps; he could take time to go around rocks, and through or over fences, and across the stream on the bridge. He had been dreading the artificial hurdles in this cross-country run; dreaming of nasty falls and barriers he could not leap. But now it was very simple. He could pick his way as he chose.

It seemed to him he had never run so fast. His legs moved without effort; his whole body swung into the stride. He felt as if he could do impossible things to-day. He was a different Judge, somehow. Gone was his dragging excess of caution; gone was his handicapping lack of confidence in himself. Barring accident, that Panther opponent would never sight him in this race.

He charged joyously toward the low trunk of a fallen tree, and rose from a daring take-off to hurdle it. But even while he was laughing from sheer en-

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thusiasm, something happened that choked back the laugh like a blow on the mouth. He knew what it was well enough; his jump had failed to clear the log. But he could do nothing to save himself. His feet stopped with a jerk. His head and body toppled on. He crashed heavily to the ground on the other side.

How long he lay there, whimpering weakly over his fall, he could not determine. A shadow finally roused him to action. It blotted out the light above the fallen tree. It rose high into the air. It moved on beyond him. And then — and not till then — did he realize that the Panther cross-country runner had passed him in the race.

CHAPTER XXII

CROSS-COUNTRY

Something seemed to yank Judge to his feet and set him running after the other. It was his own will-power, of course, but he could not understand the queer sense of duty that lay back of it. He didn't want to get up; he didn't want to go on with the race. All his enthusiasm and confidence had spilled in the fall.

But he kept running in a half-hearted way, dodging a stump that leered at him, kicking loose a vine that tried to wind about his ankle, and avoiding a hole that might — or might not — be jumped easily. He wasn't going to take any more chances.

As he jogged along, his brain cleared. After all, there was one good reason why he should finish the lap. He was the patrol leader, and his example counted for much. After he had trailed in a bad second, he could tell the fellows about getting hurt in that nasty tumble.

But was he hurt? Wasn't he shamming? Wasn't

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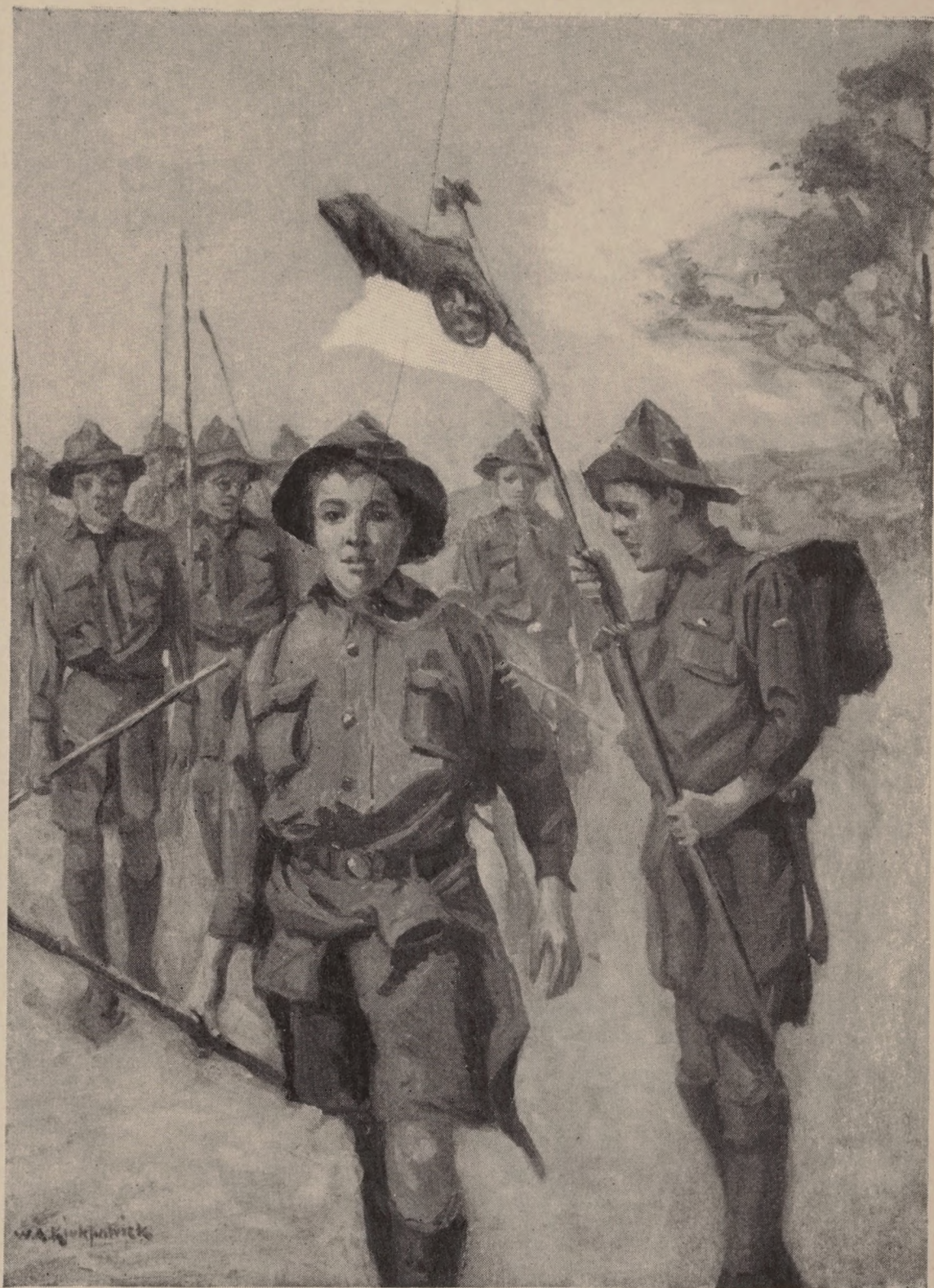
he looking for an excuse to follow the safest way to the goal, even if it chanced to be the longest?

He considered gravely. His mind reached no definite decision, but his legs began to drive faster, and he straddled and hopped and hurdled obstructions just as large as those he had been going around.

Then he thought of something else. The next relay was to be the swimming test, in which Roundy Magoon had been chosen to carry the message for the Black Eagle Patrol. Roundy was a fish in the water, but it was very important that he should start his lap of the race on even terms, at least. Unless he was ahead, or within easy striking distance of the lead, he usually showed a desire to give up. Scout Master Stanton called it lack of perseverance. In a little private notebook Judge owned, there was a line that read "Magoon — quitter?" He had never been quite sure enough of the boy to erase that question mark.

Now he lowered his head and clenched his hands. His knees began pumping up and down like piston rods. Probably the Panther runner would beat him, Judge told himself, but he wasn't going to finish all alone. It would be a race!

A bush blocked his way. Judge ran for it at top speed, and sailed over it — or almost over it, for the top branches swished against his legs. It was a prickly



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bush, and its thorns scratched. But when a second one of the same kind loomed ahead, taller and pricklier than the first, he did not hesitate. He hurdled that, too. Each jump saved a little precious time that would have been wasted by turning out.

The path through the woods led to a rail fence, with a sloping field beyond. Twenty feet to the right, in plain sight, was an open gate. Judge ignored it completely, lifting to the jump straight ahead as if he had no doubt as to his ability to clear it neatly. Just the same, his heart seemed to stop beating as he went up and up; it snapped into his throat and choked him as his foot hit the top rail and dislodged it with a noisy bang; it pounded madly as he came down to earth in a confused heap, stumbled, caught himself, stumbled a second time, and then recovered and went on in full stride.

He lifted his head now. Near the far edge of the field, where it sloped downward to a wooded gully, he saw his Panther rival. The other runner was darting to one side, at a right angle to the course. As Judge watched, he plunged ahead into some sort of an opening.

It was a long lead to overcome, but Judge had not given up. He pounded forward with renewed speed until he reached the barrier that had temporarily

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blocked the Panther. It was the trunk of a great fallen tree. Tall and solid it looked; higher than the other log that had brought him to earth, higher than the fence that had almost tripped him — and as un-giving as a rock. There was no rail here to break free if he jumped too low.

He hurdled it. Only a heel scraped lightly the bark. Save for that, he went over without touching. In his mind grew a curious wonder that he could jump so well. It gave him new confidence.

Ahead of him, the Panther runner reached a deep, wide ditch with straight up-and-down sides. Once he ran toward it, as if he had keyed himself to the point of attempting to clear it. Then, slowing abruptly, he turned and raced fifty feet to the left, where it was much narrower. By the time he sprang across and doubled back on the opposite bank, Judge was scarcely more than the width of the ditch behind him.

A clean jump across it would put him on the other's heels. A short one — But he stopped the thought dead. He measured the distance with his eyes. It was all of fourteen feet. Well, he could do that! And he ran at the take-off as hard as he could.

Somewhere in the final sprint, a doubt snapped at his legs. It was like some yelping pup. He wanted to kick it away, to forget it was there. But he could

not. As he bent his knees for the jump, he felt his confidence shaken in the teeth of that doubt.

He landed with a crash that nearly knocked the breath from his body. The jump had been short. All about him, dirt and stones rattled down into the yawning ditch. Only a sturdy root on the bank, which he had managed to seize with his clawing hand, saved him from following.

Working cautiously, he pulled himself to solid earth. By this time, of course, the Panther runner was yards ahead, but Judge took up the stern chase all over. He wasn't beaten yet. He couldn't nerve himself to jump again, naturally, but probably he wouldn't have another opportunity anyhow.

He came within sight of a rushing stream of water, apparently even wider than the ditch. He wondered how they were to cross it till he saw the sign-post with its pointing hand, and made out the rustic bridge a hundred feet below.

The Panther runner, already nearing the river, slowed to a walk. Over his shoulder, he cast a quick, calculating glance at Judge. The latter could imagine his eyes brightening as they swept from the sign to the bridge, and then darkening again as they jerked back from pursuer to the stream.

"He won't try to jump that, will he?" Judge asked

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himself suddenly. He laughed uneasily at the thought; he tried to argue away from it. "Why, he won't dare! He didn't go over the fence, did he? Or the last log? Or the wide part of the ditch? Jump! Of course, he won't jump!"

But the other did. Taking a quick run to the bank, he crouched slightly at its end, and launched himself upward and forward in a mighty spring.

"I can't make it!" Judge found himself whispering. "It's wider than the ditch! I'll cross on the bridge! I can't make it!" But still he moved toward the river at full speed.

He watched the body of the Panther jumper describe an arc through the air, and shuddered as it fell short of the other bank by two or three feet and splashed heavily into the water. Instantly the hungry current sucked it down-stream, tossing it about like a cork.

"I can't make it!" Judge moaned. "I'll cross on the bridge! I can't make it!"

He still ran. Now he was ten feet from the shore — now five — now two — now on the brink. And then, without meaning to do it at all, without realizing what impulse made him, he jumped.

There was one dizzying instant when he seemed to be falling into the stream. He cried sharply, and

flung out his arms. The current wrenched — No, that — why, that was the jolt of his landing somewhere. He — he was safely across! He had made the jump from shore to shore!

But what of the other? Judge whirled quickly at the thought, scanning the length of river in a single frightened glance. Almost at once, he saw him. Down-stream a few yards, in the very middle of the foaming current, the Panther was walking ashore; yes, *walking*, with the water only up to his waist.

Judge grinned. He might have known the cross-country run would not lead over any deep and dangerous river. This was no more than a shallow creek, for all its loud pretense. With a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to continue the race.

The way led through a thicket, down a smooth road, and finally out upon a dock, where Roundy, clad in a black bathing suit, awaited the message. With a tremendous sigh of relief, Judge handed it over to him. From somewhere behind, he could hear the distant swish of bushes as the Panther runner forced his way through the copse.

Placing the envelope on the top of his head, Roundy pulled his rubber cap over it. Then, with a flip of his round body, he dived gracefully into the lake. There was no splash. Roundy always reminded Judge

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of a seal, a waddler on land, a true fish in the water.

"They'll see!" the leader told himself, scowling at the mocking smiles on the faces of those about him. "With that lead I gave him, Roundy will show them something worth watching when he bobs to the surface. Yes, sir, they'll see!"

Well out from the shore, the water rippled and parted. A head emerged into the air. A hand lifted for the first swimming stroke.

"Now watch him!" chortled Judge happily.

There was a hush on the dock. Steps pounded over it. The Panther swimmer dived. That meant the cross-country runner had finished. But Roundy could — What was Roundy doing?

He seemed to be adjusting his rubber cap, which showed a tendency to creep over one ear. As Judge watched breathlessly, with some intuition of approaching trouble, he saw a white envelope snap to the surface of the water. Roundy clutched for it, but he was a moment too late. When he reached again, it was gone. The message had sunk to the bottom of the lake.

Back on the dock, Judge buried his head in his hands. He could think of nothing save that line in his little private note-book: "Magoon — quitter?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRUDGEON STROKE

If the ripples left by the sinking message had formed a mouth and spoken to Roundy, he could not have been more absolutely bewildered. The dive had loosened his cap, and, in stretching the rubber band to pull it lower on his head, he allowed the envelope to spill out. This did not alarm him, though; paper always floated for several seconds. So, without hurrying, he stretched forth a hand to capture it. The fingers touched only water. The message had plunged to the bottom.

He did not know, of course, that the envelope had been leaded. Now that it had sunk, even this knowledge would have been small consolation, but it might have relieved the dazed condition of his mind. As it was, he merely treaded water, with some vague hope that the message might pop into sight as abruptly as it had popped out.

What did happen was almost as disconcerting as the loss itself. Just behind him, on a line with the dock, a head came dripping from the depths below,

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two blue eyes looked at him with mild distrust, and a voice piped: "You'd better get going, Black Eagle, because I'm going to beat you a mile." Then a slim white arm reached out and over, and the Panther swimmer pulled himself even, where he hung for a second, and then past, kicking a shower of water into the other's face by way of disdainful challenge.

Roundy glowered after him. "I'd like to make you go faster than that!" he growled. "If I had the old message, I could do it, too, young fellow!"

But he didn't have it, of course, and he couldn't match his skill with the Panther's unless he did. At that moment, it lay on the bottom of the lake, and its loss meant the defeat of the Black Eagle Patrol in the great relay race. Roundy was sorry, but there was no good keeping on after they had been distanced like this. He decided he might as well swim back to the dock. Maybe he could explain the accident to Judge, so they wouldn't be too hard on him. With this idea in mind, he thrust forth a dripping arm for the first pull.

But the stroke was never completed. In mid-air, as he was about to drop his flat hand to the water, he halted it suddenly.

"Why, I can't turn back," he told himself wonderingly, lying on his left side and staring up at the blue

sky. "I promised him I'd deliver that message no matter what happened."

Roundy sighed. He had no heart for the job ahead of him, but a promise was a promise. There were no *ifs* and *buts* about it. When he said he'd do a thing, he did it, that was all.

He paddled, dog-fashion, about the place where the message had sunk. When he had calculated the spot as well as he could, he dived, plunging head and shoulders into the water with a twist that threw hips and legs high into the air. This left his body almost vertical. A thrust of his dangling feet and a few vigorous breast strokes with his arms carried him to the bottom. He wondered if the Panther swimmer could dive eight or ten feet down from the surface. Most scouts couldn't.

It was green and murky below. Roundy opened his eyes slowly, taking care not to spread the lids too wide in the stare common to the beginner. He could see clearly enough for his purpose, but there was no sign of the missing envelope.

Undiscouraged, he began a systematic search. Now swimming under water, now dragging himself on the bottom with the aid of slimy weeds, now crawling with stones in his hands, he combed a space some ten feet in diameter. A half-minute passed. A full min-

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ute. A minute and a half. Still he peered and groped. He had promised.

But his lungs were protesting now. With proper preparation, he could stay under water a minute longer than this, but he had found no time to practice the necessary breathing before taking the dive.* He must rise to the surface for air unless — Then, all at once, he spied the square of white paper. It lay among some weeds, at their very roots.

By this time, his lungs ached like a tooth. There was not a second to spare. With a downward arching dive, he swam to the envelope, caught it in his fingers as he passed, and thrust his legs, frog-fashion, against the lake-bed, shooting himself upward. At the surface, he blew out his breath like some great porpoise. But the message was his once more. He could keep that promise.

He tucked the envelope securely in his cap, whistling a little at its weight, and understanding for the first time why it had sunk so rapidly. Treading water until he could get his bearings, he looked for the inlet toward which they were to swim.

* The average healthy boy can hold his breath under water for about forty seconds. If he will breathe deeply through the open mouth twenty times to the minute, fully expanding the lungs, for a period of two and one-half minutes, he will then be able to stay under water nearly three times as long as he could otherwise.

It was the third mouth of land, wasn't it? Or was it the fourth? While waiting back there on the dock, he remembered, they had marked its position by a tall oak in the center of the island, that stood exactly in line with it. But now, looking upward from the surface of the water, he could not see that particular tree at all. The whole shore line appeared changed.

As a matter of fact, counting from this new angle, it was neither the third nor the fourth inlet, but the second. A raspberry bush grew on the point of one of its two little peninsulas jutting out into the lake. Good scout that he was, Roundy had not been satisfied with only a single identifying feature; he demanded more. So his keen eyes had searched till they rested upon this raspberry bush.

He was glad now that he had taken the extra precaution. He wondered if the Panther swimmer had been content with sighting the oak tree. Oh, well, it didn't matter much, one way or the other. The great medley relay race wasn't a race any longer. He was only keeping on himself because of the promise.

A single movement straightened him out horizontally, breast floating on the surface, legs drawn up. With his hand in the air, he reached lazily ahead with his right arm, sweeping it downward through the water toward his feet. At the same time, he kicked vigor-

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ously. As his body turned slightly on its right side, he thrust forward the other arm, rolling over to the left like a water-logged canoe.

This was the trudgeon stroke: two feet and one arm pushing backward together; body pulsing forward, first on one side and then on the other; right hand sweeping from the surface in a great arc, left hand taking up the task while the mate recovered — right, left, right, left, over and over again.

But there was nothing tiresome or monotonous about it to Roundy. He liked to coax the cool water over his dipping shoulder, and hear it gurgle softly in his ear. He liked to lift his tousled head with a quick fling, and laugh at the rainbow in the spray. But he liked, most of all, the feel of water driving against him, the smart of new-churned waves slapping his body, and the urge of eager muscles to be working harder and faster.

He was glad he had kept going. There was the promise, to be sure, but he was glad for still another reason, which he couldn't quite put into words. He had felt that way once or twice when he had done a good turn without any possible hope of thanks or reward. It was a lot like the thrill of winning a close race.

The farther he swam, the better he felt. He was

swirling through the water like the fin of a submerged fish. The thought tickled him, and he chuckled. Why, if that Panther swimmer could see him now, he'd swear he was riding a terrified whale, and digging it with arms and legs to get more speed.

The feeling of happiness increased. It was just the kind of a day to be in the lake, with a blue sky and a warm sun overhead. What if that fresh Panther kid had kicked water in his face? It hadn't left any scars, had it? And what if he did have to lose? It wasn't the losing that counted so much as the way a fellow lost. After this, he decided, he'd finish out every race clear to the end, no matter if he dropped a million miles behind. It made you feel good inside to do things that way.

As he headed for the little peninsula with the raspberry bush on its point, another swimmer came chugging out of the inlet beyond. Roundy blinked at him in profound astonishment. It was no other than his Panther rival, and, if appearances counted for anything, the other had been wasting precious time on a voyage of discovery. He had failed to observe that the goal of his swim was close to a raspberry bush on a little peninsula.

The two boys were about the same distance from the inlet. Roundy set his teeth with a stubborn click; he

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meant to be there first. Apparently the other made the same resolution about himself at the same moment. Quite as if the challenge had been cried aloud and accepted, each lowered his head and plunged forward.

But Roundy knew, deep in his heart, that he could not be beaten that day. He swam cleanly, swiftly, exultantly. He could have gone on forever; nothing would have made him quit. There had been born in him a never-say-die spirit, which would serve always.

As he rounded the point a little in advance, he slowed suddenly. There was something he had almost forgotten. Waiting till the other was just behind, he kicked out joyously with his right foot, sending a great shower of water into the outraged Panther's face. Then, having avenged the earlier insult, he writhed and squirmed to a longer lead, swam over to the canoe in which Handy waited impatiently to be off on the next relay, carefully removed his rubber cap, and handed over the elusive message.

"Don't quit!" he advised Handy solemnly. "And be careful! No accidents, mind you!"

"No accidents!" promised Handy over his shoulder, dipping deep with the paddle.

But two minutes later, rounding the tip of the island, he ran full upon a jagged rock and stove a great hole in the bottom of his canoe!

CHAPTER XXIV

A MATTER OF HARBORS

As the canoe struck, Handy dropped limply to the bottom. Crunching and grinding in a way to chill the stoutest heart, it drove full upon the submerged rock. Here, for just a second, it hung impaled; then slipped off into the deep water beyond.

Handy crawled forward to examine the hurt. One glance told him it was serious; for already the water was flooding in through the long, jagged hole. The canoe was sinking. It was only a question of how long it could remain afloat.

The nearest harbor was the island. Toward this Handy swung the nose of the frail craft, digging frenziedly with his paddle. His muscles were jerking and twitching. His nerves shrieked for him to hurry. His very flesh was creeping. He was in the grip of utter panic.

Not a coward at heart, his was a nervous temperament that gave way to sudden, overpowering frights. Just now he was in a mortal funk; his mind was a rioting ground of terror. He meant to beach the

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canoe on the sandy island, and then run from it as fast and as far as he could, till the jarring shock and tearing sound were only distant memories.

Some impulse prompted him to glance toward the paddler who was carrying the message for the Panther Patrol. The fellow was looking back at him. Now, a racing canoeist, with his paddle flying like a dog's pawing foot, has no business allowing his eyes to stray from dead ahead; and so what happened to this breaker of the nautical rule was precisely what he deserved.

He twisted about to see what Handy was doing. This lengthened his reach to the water, without in any way adding to the inches of his paddle. On the next stroke, as might have been expected, he fanned only unresisting air. There was a tumble backward, a list of the canoe, a gurgle of pouring waters, and as complete an upset as anybody could reasonably hope to witness.

Handy stared with fascinated eyes. The canoe had gone down by the stern; it shot up out of the water bow first, like a jack-in-the-box, leaned over a little in mid-air, and slapped down upon the surface, almost empty.

If its skipper had not lost his grip on himself, he might have been all right. There was his boat, waiting and ready for him to resume the race; and there was

he, uninjured and perhaps freshened by his ducking on this hot day. But when he tried frantically to clamber over the side, the canoe promptly turned turtle, spilling him out, and then floated sullenly away from him, bottom up. Handy could imagine it saying: "Well, I did all I could to help you before, Mister Landlubber; now you help yourself!"

He chuckled over this conceit. Why on earth didn't that fellow make the best of a bad business? Was he going to hang to the overturned boat like a scared rat? Then, abruptly, Roundy stopped laughing. The water in his own canoe was six inches deep; it would sink in another minute. Close at hand, on the island, was a harbor he could reach in time. A half-mile away, on the mainland, Bi was waiting for him to deliver the message.

There was no hesitation on Handy's part. He twisted the paddle in his hands, and headed the nose of the canoe toward the mainland.

The other's accident had made him forget his unreasoning fear. Now that he could think clearly, he had no idea of running away in a panic. After all, there was no real danger. He was clad lightly, and he could swim.

Steadily the water crept higher and higher, swishing and lurching against the sides. He kicked off his

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canvas shoes expectantly. As long as the canoe made fair headway, he kept paddling; but when it began to check between strokes, and to skew wildly, he knew he was only wasting his strength. It needed bailing out.

He moved backward to the stern. His weight was enough. In a mad torrent, the water rushed over gunwale and deck to add its volume to that inside.

Even then, he did not move away. He allowed himself to sink, forcing down the stern until the canoe was almost vertical. As the Panther's craft had done, his plunged like a diver. When it rose again, he managed to tip it in the right direction for its fall, and grinned proudly as he saw that it rode high. He had learned a new trick about emptying a canoe in deep water.

Getting aboard was simple enough, of course; it just happened that the Panther had never learned how, or that he had forgotten in his temporary fright. Now he watched Handy go over the end like an acrobat. A second later, as the Black Eagle scout scudded past him, he set about righting his own boat.

If it had not been for that yawning hole in the bottom of his canoe, and for the water that flooded through it, Handy would have finished his lap of the race well in the lead. But there was no way to patch

the rip without the proper materials, and, even if he had possessed them, there would have been no time for the job. His duty was plain. He could only dip and pull to the limit of his skill, feeling the canoe ride harder and slower with each successive stroke of the paddle.

He sank it again. This time it leaped out of the water at a bad angle, and half filled. As he plunged it down for the second time, standing aft, the Panther canoeist went slipping past. Handy wondered how he had managed with the bailing and the boarding, and guessed he must have learned from observation. Well, it couldn't be helped if a fellow unwittingly showed his rival how to beat him. Just the same, it was a queer freak of racing.

He took up the chase. For the first hundred yards, he gained a little. His paddling was cleaner, with more finish and more power. He knew better how to make the stroke a swing from the shoulder, as it should be, and how to use the body in pushing the blade through the water. But after that, for perhaps another hundred yards, he had all he could do to hold his own. By this time, too, the water was over his ankles in the canoe, and he began to fall behind the leader.

But there was only a little farther to go now, and

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he resolved to make the shore without halting to capsize again. With this purpose in mind, he shortened his stroke to a mere chop, increasing the speed till the canoe was riding along on an even keel. This served to keep the water inside from churning about too dangerously.

The Panther landed. A team-mate grasped the message, and started with it up the slanting cliff that walled the lake at this point. Bi waved for Handy to hurry.

Inch by inch, the canoe settled lower. Handy bent his paddle with each heaving stroke, but it was like driving a water-logged scow. He was hot and tired. Perspiration dripped and trickled from his hair. The muscles of his arms cut like red-hot wires. His whole body cried for rest.

He dragged closer to the shore. By this time, of course, the canoe was half sunk. It shipped water constantly over the gunwale of one side or the other, and he kept it afloat only by expert balancing.

The last twenty feet were the worst. His blade swirled without apparent result. When the lurching boat moved at all, it was to veer crazily to port or starboard. But each time he forced it back to its course, and each time he knew he had gained a little. And so, in this zigzag fashion, he grounded presently on the

sloping beach, just within reach of Bi's outstretched hand.

As the other sprang away, Handy waded to dry land and squatted down to watch. Bi's stint was the carrying of the message to the top of a cliff-like hill, where he was to turn it over to S. S. for the next relay.

The Black Eagles had chosen Bi for this climbing lap because of his great strength and endurance. Handy expected him to dash at the incline and scramble madly upward like a mountain goat. Instead, he picked his way cautiously, tapping with his staff and testing each jutting foothold before he trusted his full weight upon it. He circled the rocks he might have scaled; he stopped to search for easy slopes to ascend; he took no chances whatever. This was so unlike the usual impetuous Bi that Handy stared after him in wonder.

Far above him, climbing with daring skill, the Panther scout neared the summit. Confident now of victory, he turned to look down upon the plodding Bi.

With a sharp cry, Handy sprang to his feet. He rubbed his eyes to make sure the sight was not some trick of his imagination. Then, with hands cupped to his mouth for a megaphone, he shouted a thunderous warning up the hill.

"Look out above you, Bi! Look out above!"

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE HILL

Dirt and sand showered down the side of the hill. A stump bowled past. A rock jounced its way to the bottom.

"H'm!" muttered Bi. "Looks like a mountain avalanche. I wonder what — Hello, there's another rock!"

But it was not. As the rolling object came nearer, he saw that it was a boy, all flying legs and arms, and that he was tumbling head-over-heels down the steep incline.

"Why, it's the Panther scout!" said Bi in mild amazement. "If he isn't more careful, he's going to get hurt."

He watched the frantic efforts of the boy to brake himself to a stop. Clawing hands gripped the tender grass. Stiffened legs dug into the sandy soil. The body curled convulsively and then straightened to its full length. But still it swept downward in a slipping, pitching, rolling jumble of movement.

"It's lucky he picked out that stretch of sand and

grass for his tobogganing," Bi told himself. "If he bounced much on the rocks down below —"

The thought broke in the middle, and another took its place. Unless the body were stopped at this level, it would assuredly crash upon the rocks.

If Bi had been slow to recognize the danger, he made up for it now in quick action. Three strides carried him to a point in line with the plunging body. He tossed aside his staff. He braced one powerful leg against the root of a tree. Then, leaning forward with outflung arms, he calmly awaited the collision.

To his matter-of-fact mind, there was nothing particularly wonderful about what followed. Lots of his tackles on the football field had proved more exciting. The boy came flinging against his chest, driving him back and down. Strong as he was, Bi wavered uncertainly, and for one tense instant it looked as if they might both topple over. But his muscles, flexing before the strain, brought him erect again, and he grunted shortly to mark the end of the struggle. The Panther scout slipped to the ground in a huddled heap.

Recovering his staff, which he would need for the balance of the climb, Bi gently prodded the other with it. The boy shrank from the contact, trembling and crying out.

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"You aren't hurt," said Bi, not unkindly. "You're just scared." He reached down and took the boy's arm. "Up you come!"

The Panther climber allowed himself to be set upon his feet. Under pretense of brushing him off, Bi ran a practiced hand over his body, searching for bruises or broken bones. But there were none.

"Sound as a dollar!" he told the boy, and whacked him hard on the back. "There, that will take the cobwebs from your brain and make you remember we're running a race to the top of this hill. If you'll take my advice, kid"—he could not resist that thrust—"you'll climb the rest of the way more carefully. Good-by!" And he began to stride upward.

He still climbed cautiously, but the accident had not changed his style one whit. Moving deliberately, he made sure of one level before mounting to the next. Where there were two paths to a height, he chose the safe one, which usually proved the long way round. He stopped frequently to study and ponder. He retreated from sheer walls, preferring to circle them. He never hurried, but, on the other hand, he never slipped. This gait would have driven a nervous boy mad, but they said in the patrol that Bi's nerves were all muscles.

The Panther was climbing again, too, but he was

making sad work of it. Though he now took no more chances than Bi, he failed utterly to copy that youth's success. Bi was calm and fearless, but sensibly cautious; the other was unstrung and frightened, with the memory of his fall a hovering terror that held him back. Steadily, as they both neared the summit, Bi drew farther away from the other, till he had assumed a comfortable lead.

The fall had handicapped the Panther climber in another way, by depriving him of his staff. Bi's served as cane, crutch, brace, tester, divining rod, digger of footholds, horizontal bar between two end supports, and vertical pole when thrust into the ground. It was always in use; he could hardly have done without it. He was sorry the Panther had lost his staff, because he wanted to beat him on even terms.

The last stretch was the hardest of all. The sandy soil gave way to rocks; the incline grew steeper. Here and there, in some fissure, a stunted pine managed to exist, but for the most part the surface was barren of plant life.

Bi climbed it as he had the other portions of the hill, carefully, slowly, surely, winding in and out, zig-zagging upward, doubling back on his trail for a fresh start, always undismayed and undiscouraged. Event-

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ually, of course, he reached the summit. As he paused to examine its flat surface and locate the Black Eagle scouts, he was not even breathing heavily.

S. S. waved to him from a little distance, and Bi trotted over to the waiting group. One of the judges took the message from him. As Bi understood this relay, S. S. was to offer first aid to Bunny, who was assumed to have a broken leg. Once the splints had been properly made and set with bandages, the latter scout could open the message and signal its contents to Specs, who was to take it down at the Elkana athletic park.

"You certainly took your time climbing that hill," complained a querulous voice.

Bi whirled quickly. It was Specs who had spoken.

"Why — why, I thought you were to be over in town, to take Bunny's signals — Where's Bunny? What's happened? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to have S. S. put splints on my leg," said Specs sullenly. "No, I didn't say foot," he added, as he saw Bi staring at that bandaged member. That hurt's the real thing. I ran a nail into it a while ago."

"But where's Bunny?"

"Where do you suppose? He's going to run the hundred-yard dash in my place — try to. I'm too

bunged up. You know what that means, don't you? It's good-by to the relay race."

Bi considered thoughtfully. Specs had beaten Bunny in the trial sprints, but only by slight margins; the exchange to-day would mean no great loss on the cinder track. But the signaling was quite another matter. Specs was as rapid with the flags as anybody in the patrol, but he was also excitable. Bi doubted if the erratic youngster could send a long message without losing his head at some point.

"Yes, I know what it means," he told Specs. "Just this: You last fellows in the relay must keep cool and —"

All at once, it seemed to Bi, people began running crazily in every direction. The Panther hill-climber finished with a rush, delivering his message. A teammate dashed away to find splints for the first aid contest. S. S. came racing madly toward the reclining Specs. An official trotted over to them.

S. S. flung the boards on the grass. One was an ideal splint for a leg supposed to be broken between the knee and the ankle; the other two required some cutting and splitting to make them the proper size.

His knife was out in a jiffy, narrowing and shortening one of the latter pieces of wood. When it was ready, he clamped it against the outside of Specs' leg,

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utilizing the untrimmed board for the inside splint.

Bi marveled at S. S.'s neat handling of the job. The splints balanced perfectly in weight and appearance. They were bound into place with deft precision. The swathing of cloth smoothed out under the gentle touch of his hands. A hospital surgeon, with every appliance at his command, would not have been ashamed of the result. Yet S. S. had been restricted by the rules to such sticks for splints as he could pick up beyond a certain boundary line, and to handkerchiefs and a necktie — his own wearing apparel — for bandages.

He stood up. "Ready, sir!" he told the judge.

When he stopped to think it over afterward, Bi remembered these things: The Panther worker was only half done with his first aid. The official walked away from S. S. Specs unconsciously thrust out his sore foot, jerking it back with an exclamation of pain. Something snapped distinctly.

It was the splint on Specs' other leg. S. S. had blundered in some way. Bi waited patiently for him to speak, to explain, to begin the fashioning of another splint to replace the broken one. Specs rose briskly to his feet.

Still S. S. said nothing. Bi watched him curiously from the tail of his eye. Didn't he know that unsatis-

factory work in first aid must be done over again before the scout's team-mate could start signaling? Or was it because he did know that he kept silent? Come to think of it, the official had been out of hearing when the splint broke.

Specs hobbled forward. The bandaged leg limped more than the other, as if he had forgotten which injury was real and which imaginary. It was very amusing. But S. S. and Bi looked at him with unsmiling eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI

GOOD SIGNS AND BAD SIGNALS

Specs was blissfully unconscious of the broken splint. When S. S. stopped him, he was hobbling forward to claim the message.

“Go back,” said S. S., pushing him with his hand. “Go back; you can’t signal till I fix your leg again.”

Bi smiled happily. Specs couldn’t understand why, but there was no doubting the fact. Then S. S. called out to the official who had watched the bandaging:

“One of my splints broke, sir. I’m going to put a new one in its place.”

The man nodded, moving toward them. Specs flung himself moodily upon the ground. The catastrophe was too great to look its worst all at once.

“It’s the first one of mine that ever broke,” confessed S. S. regretfully. He was already busy trimming the remaining board for a new splint. “I hated to own up, too.”

“You saved time by speaking promptly and honestly,” the official told him. “Your signaler would

not have begun sending the message till this work was done again."

"Why not?" flashed Specs. "How did you know it broke?"

"I didn't. But I knew it would break as soon as you stirred about. I've seen that splint before." He turned to S. S. "Didn't it strike you as peculiar to find a splint exactly the right size and shape lying out there? I am not supposed to explain all the preparations for this relay, but I may suggest that somebody put that particular splint where you found it. Moreover, it was purposely weakened by the judges—There, I've let the cat out of the bag!—before they dropped it."

"Why?" demanded Specs.

"So that the scout finding it would do what this young man here failed to do—test it for strength. In the case of a real injury, as you may know, a weak splint is likely to do more harm than none at all."

"Was there another weak one out there?" asked Specs hopefully, looking across at the Panther, who had just completed his first aid work.

"There were several. The scout from the other patrol picked up two, but tested both and threw them away. His final selections were firm boards."

Specs squirmed. It was not the first time he had

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moved. He knew he was hampering S. S., and he dropped his head and shoulders to the ground, stretching out at full length and trying to forget what was to happen a little later. But he couldn't. The disappointment had become too keen. He wouldn't be signaling alone now, as he had expected, unhurried and unworried, with plenty of time to emphasize each position of the flags. Instead, he would start seconds behind his rival, and be nervous and probably inaccurate, and keep on getting worse and worse. He hadn't trained himself for signaling; his business was to run.

S. S. finished at last. The leg was clamped between two strong splints and bound firmly with handkerchiefs and necktie. Specs nodded approvingly. It was a neat, workmanlike job; just the sort you'd expect from a fellow who had been nicknamed Spick and Span.

The official nodded, too. He was thoroughly satisfied this time, and he smiled at S. S. exactly as Bi had. Specs took the message he held out, with some faint notion that he'd like to have somebody smile at him like that.

The Panther was already signaling, with his flags whirling about like a windmill. Specs tore hastily at the envelope in an attempt to rip open the end. But the oiled paper was tough and slippery, and his fingers

pulled loose. Scowling over his failure, he tried again. This time he managed to free the enclosed letter, which he unfolded with a savage flap of his hand.

The message was long and complicated. It covered all of one typewritten sheet and part of another. Specs eyed it irritably; they might at least have given him something reasonably easy to signal.

Without stopping to read more than the first word, he picked up his two flags and faced the distant Bunny, whom he could see waiting on a little hummock near the athletic park. Allowing one flag to drop in front of him, he held the other straight out to the right. This was B in the semaphore code, and was the call letter of the Black Eagle Patrol.

It was answered instantly by Bunny, who was to serve as both reader and writer-down at the receiving station. Specs was now free to signal the message.

Instead of beginning at once, he turned to look at the Panther's flags. They jerked forward and backward like the spokes of a rimless wheel, never faltering, never stopping their steady spelling out of words. The mechanical perfection was enough to upset Specs, and he came back to his own task with shaken confidence.

He whipped through the first word of the message at top speed. That was to get accustomed to the feel

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of the flags. He knew his angles were slovenly, and his pauses between letters a little slurred, but he hoped Bunny could follow him. Evidently, though, he could not; for Specs saw him raise both arms horizontally to their full extent, thus signaling the letter R, which meant "Repeat."

He sullenly spelled the word a second time, moving the flags more slowly. Again Bunny stopped him with the R. Specs groaned his disgust. His sore foot was paining him now, and his temper began to rise. He wanted to get the signaling done. He wasn't going to stand there all day repeating that first word. If Bunny couldn't read it, they'd better get somebody who could.

But the third attempt promised better. He told himself he was working more smoothly and accurately. Yes, sir, a blind man could have read his first few letters. Once he had completed that word, he would signal faster; maybe, after all, he could gain on his rival.

A fly buzzed to the back of his neck. He shook it off. Another lighted upon his bare arm. A quiver of the muscles frightened it away. But a third came, and a fourth, and after them a hundred more. They swarmed over him, biting at his unbandaged leg, and at his face and neck and arms and hands. When he

could stand it no longer, he drove them away with the swishing flags.

“ R,” signaled Bunny, confused by this strange waving. “ R.”

By this time, of course, the last bit of Specs’ calmness had taken flight, and he was in no condition to repeat that word or any other. He couldn’t remember how to hold the flags for the first letter; he couldn’t remember any longer what the word was. He always lost his head in a tight pinch. All the fellows knew it. He didn’t suppose Bunny had a shred of confidence in his signaling ability.

He watched dully as the “ repeat ” gave way to some other letter. It was A. Then came M. A-M; that was *am*. Bunny must be sending him some advice or abuse, probably abuse. Well, he’d see what it was.

“ Am — waiting,” he read, “ for — best signaler — in — State — to — hit — his — stride — Ready! ”

Specs’ heart jumped with pride. “ Best signaler in the State,” Bunny called him. That was putting it pretty strong, of course, but — wasn’t he? In the simple matter of speed, he didn’t know any scout who could beat him.

The flags drooped to a stop. As Specs watched, Bunny tossed them far to one side, pitching them high through the air. His action said, as plainly as words:

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"There, I'm through with them. I know Specs. He won't make any mistakes or signal carelessly. I shan't have to stop him for repeats or explanations. Now go ahead!"

Specs' face crimsoned. He could feel his cheeks burning. A glad, hot wave of thanksgiving swept over him. If Bunny depended upon him enough to throw away his flags, he must certainly signal that message correctly. It was like a responsibility he couldn't dodge. And if Bunny were as sure of him as all that, he was absolutely sure of himself.

Once more he spelled out the first word of the message. With his mind in this new glow of confidence, he had no trouble in remembering it or in remembering how to place the flags for the various letters. At the end, while his heart seemed to stop beating for a moment, he waited. There was no "repeat" this time. Bunny had read him!

He went on to the next words, increasing his speed a little. He forgot the Panther rival. He forgot the watching Bi and S. S. He was intent only upon proving to Bunny that the latter had made no mistake in thinking him the best signaler in the State.

It was a long and tiring test. The message had been made purposely difficult with unfamiliar words, with figures, and with clauses that seemed to have no

sense of meaning. But Specs plodded straight through to the end without pause or serious error, whipping the flags faster and faster all the time. He'd show Bunny Payton what the best signaler in the State could do when he really felt like signaling.

Not till he had spelled out the last word did he think of his opponent. He turned then, expecting to find the Panther had been an easy victor. To his surprise, the other was just rolling his flags. They had finished together.

"Well, Bi," called Specs a little proudly, "did I keep cool?"

Bi turned to him with the baffling smile he had given S. S. a few minutes before. "If there are any cooler people around here," he said, "they're frozen — frozen stiff and solid."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST LAP

The judges waited, stop-watches in hand. The two competing scouts alternated between scribbling on their pads and peering toward the waving flags on the hill. As soon as either finished putting his message on paper, he was to call out, when the exact time would be recorded. This would entitle him to start first on the final lap of the relay, followed by the other in as many seconds as he fell behind in this signal-receiving test.

"Done!" said Bunny suddenly.

"Done!" said the Panther scout by his side.

"Click!" went one stop-watch.

"Click!" went the other.

The judges reached for the pads upon which the two messages were written. Each read carefully, nodded, examined his watch, and marked a symbol on the paper. There followed a brief conference between them. Then one stepped forward to make an announcement.

"We find," he said, "that both messages are copied correctly. Both were completed at exactly the same

time. Inasmuch as this test is a tie, both runners will be started together in the final dash. Young gentlemen, we will now adjourn to the cinder running track."

The Panther scout was Deek, who had pitched in the baseball game that morning. He was a tall boy, clean and long of limb, with all the earmarks of a natural runner.

"Here's where I get even with you for the licking you handed us on the diamond," he remarked with quiet confidence.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did," admitted Bunny humbly. He wanted to win, of course; he was going to try his best to win. But there was no dodging Deek's record in the qualifying meet. It had been two whole seconds under the figure Bunny himself had set early one morning in a secret trial back home, with Uncle Henry timing him. Yes, Deek was undoubtedly the faster.

They reached the track. Bunny took a tape-measure from his pocket, and, stretching it back of the white starting line, marked a point three or four inches to the rear. Here he dug a little hole. Thrusting his left toe into it, he knelt upon the other knee, bringing it to a position opposite the middle of his left foot. Where the right toe pointed downward, he scooped out a second hole.

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Deek watched him with a contemptuous smile. He made his own toe-holes with the tip of his shoe, calculating with a quick glance their distance back of the line. But Bunny was not disturbed by the sneer. He had practiced starts enough to know the importance of this trifling detail, and he had heard that a change of an inch and a half in the position of the left foot was enough to make a noted sprinter a yard faster in the first fifteen yards.*

Deek raised his eyebrows at Bunny's cork grips, too, but he offered no comment.

"Are you ready?" asked the starting judge.

The runners nodded, moving forward to the line.

"On your marks!"

Bunny slipped the toes of his shoes into the holes he had dug. He knelt on his right knee, one hand touching the track.

"Get set!"

The knees came up. The other hand went down. He took a long, deep breath. He was crouching now, ready for the spring. It was so still before the shot that he could hear the slight grating of the self-cocking hammer on the pistol.

"Bang!"

* This statement was made by John Graham, former athletic instructor at Harvard.

Bunny leaped forward, kicking back as a swimmer might. The holes offered firm braces for his feet. Over to the right, where Deek had been crouching, he heard a long rasp upon the cinders, and knew the Panther had slipped a little in getting away. That meant Bunny was off to a clean lead.

He doubled it. Before he had gone a dozen yards, he trebled it. To the cheering Lakeville spectators, it looked as if he were about to leave Deek completely in the ruck. But Bunny knew better. This first flurry was not a fair match of speed; that would come later. It was simply the triumph of knowing how to run.

There were things Deek hadn't learned. Mastering them meant hard work and a constant bothering with trifles. Anyhow, you couldn't get more speed out of a fellow than was in him, could you? He jerked erect as he left the starting line; Bunny straightened up gradually, taking four or five strides before he was in an upright position. Deek swung his arms together, like a jumper; Bunny flung left arm and right leg forward at the crack of the pistol, thus balancing his body. Deek strove to gain by making his first strides full-length; Bunny stretched his, bit by bit, to correspond with his increasing speed. There was gain in each right method and loss in each wrong. One runner

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helped himself along; the other held himself back.

But this was only in the first quarter of the race. At the end of twenty-five yards, Bunny heard behind him the tattoo of footbeats, already steadying and driving harder. In a sudden chill of dread, he called upon his reserve force. He was afraid there would be no answer, but his legs responded at once. His damp fingers relaxed their clutching grip of the corks. His breath, held till now for the sake of buoyancy, escaped in a long gasp of relief.

But the trailing steps pounded faster, too. Try as he might, he could not get away from them. After a little, indeed, his keen ear told him they were creeping closer, and he admitted grudgingly that the Panther could go like a streak.

He fought back the temptation to steal a glance over his shoulder at Deek. He pictured him running with mouth open, forehead puckered, fists chugging straight ahead, and legs pedaling like mad. He probably looked that way himself. But his legs weren't as long, and he couldn't stride as far. That was why Deek outran him so easily.

The flying feet behind beat louder. The *tap-tap* swelled to a mighty *thump-thump*. On either side, people leaned over the track, shouting encouragement, and looking back of him — always back. It was Deek

they were cheering: Deek, the trailer, the under dog in the struggle. Nobody seemed to pay any attention to Bunny, nor to realize that he was running his heart out in the hopeless task of beating a faster sprinter. His was the real uphill fight, if they only knew it!

Deek was coming like the wind, gaining at every stride. It was as if Bunny had slowed to wait for him. He hadn't, of course; his pace was faster now than at any time since the start. Deek's best was simply better than his best.

A hot breath poured against his right shoulder. A swinging hand flecked his. He tried to let himself out a little more; tried to hold his tiny lead. But it was no use. Deek came even with him.

They were neck and neck. Bunny had thought he was running his fastest, but now he uncovered a new burst of speed. It was dizzying. The track slapped toward him. His legs threatened to tangle. The *crunch-crunch* of shoes meeting cinders was like the danger signal of a rattle-snake. And still Deek outran him.

“Beat him, Bunny! Oh, beat him!”

He smiled. That was Molly Sefton's voice. The first words flung in his face. The next came from the side. The last were distant echoes. But the shout

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spurred him on. He hung grimly by Deek's side like a shadow.

The other swerved a little. There was no reason for it. He had simply turned from his straight course on the wide track. But to Bunny it was like the cool of a breeze. It freshened him and gave him new courage. Before Deek knew it, he had shot ahead; only by inches, to be sure, but still ahead.

The end couldn't be many seconds off now. He was too tired to go much farther. The excitement had left him irritable and fogged his mind. There was some word he had told himself to remember; now it was gone. He wanted a drink. He couldn't land on the balls of his feet any longer. When he came down on his heels, it sent ugly jolts through his body; he didn't like that. His ankles threatened to turn on the bumps. Those legs under him must be somebody else's; his never acted that way. He wondered if Deek's did.

Why was everybody yelling? What did the crowd mean by getting on the track? Was that a wire crossing it. Then, suddenly, his vision cleared and he understood. The race was almost over. And Deek, whom he could never leave behind, was by his side again, running shoulder to shoulder with him.

His finger-nails bit into the corks; they helped.

He swung them like dumb-bells, driving his tired body along. Well, he had given his best. Nothing remained but to keep running to the finish —

Finish! That was the word he had been trying to remember! Specs had beaten him once — five inches! — because of a weak finish.

His chin came up. His breast pressed out. He put the last ounce of speed into his running, and the final yards swept under him like a torrent. At the very end, with that word on his lips, he flung himself forward.

A thin bit of yarn, the finishing-line tape, fluttered idly over his arm and jerked loose again. It seemed to him he had felt it break across his breast, but he could not be sure. He had thought he beat Specs that time, too.

He slowed awkwardly, running stiff-legged, and came to a full stop. Things looked queer, somehow, and there was an incessant din all about him. He sank down on the grass beside the track.

His head cleared. The ringing in his ears died out. Curiously enough, the first words he heard distinctly were those one stranger was addressing to another.

“I take off my hat to that youngster,” he said. “Outrun and up against a faster sprinter, he came through with as pretty a win as I’d care to see.”

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"Plucky, wasn't it?" ventured the other.

"Yes, plucky — and something more. You can't beat his kind, Bob. He'd always have the edge in a race. He'd begin to win by digging better toe-holes than the other fellow, and starting in better form, and running straighter and truer, and breathing more naturally, and helping his stride with body and arms, and finishing with head up and chest out. I didn't suppose they turned out boys nowadays as painstaking and thorough and trustworthy about details as that. This scout movement must —"

The shouts in Bunny's ears drowned out the balance of the speech. Somebody — a dozen somebodies — told him he had won, and congratulated him, and talked excitedly about the way he had broken the tape a few inches ahead of the Panther runner.

But it was no longer news to him. He was decently modest, he hoped, but he couldn't very well help guessing the stranger had been talking about him. Bunny knew he had won, and how.

"Good boy!" boomed Uncle Henry. "I'm proud of you."

"I'm glad you're a good scout," smiled Mr. Stanton. He understood.

"If you please, kind sir," said Molly Sefton's mocking voice in his ear, "Dad wants to know if the Black

Eagle Patrol can be ready by next Tuesday for that trip to New York City. If — Bunny! Bunny! How you did run!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

LEADER OF THE PATROL

They were home again. For the hundredth time in the last week, Scout Master Stanton counted noses. Yes, they were all there — the eight members of the Black Eagle Patrol and the one prospective tenderfoot. For the hundredth time, he heaved a sigh of relief.

They were all talking. It seemed to him there had never been two consecutive minutes during that week when they were not talking. They had begun as soon as the relay race was over. They had continued on the train East, finally exhausting everybody but the Pullman porter, who smiled admiringly over their khaki uniforms and said "Yas, suh" and "No, suh" at proper intervals. They had talked to a station master in New York City, and to the street car conductor, and to the big policeman at the intersection of Broadway, Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street, and to the elevator man who shot them fourteen stories upward in the immense building on the corner, and to the trim scout in the reception room of the National Headquar-

ters of the Boy Scouts of America, and to the brisk editor in another office, and to the smiling chief scout librarian with him, and to lots of other people whose names they couldn't remember. Then, having limbered up with this preliminary canter of conversation, they settled down to the real business of talking. From that moment to this, during their waking hours, they had never stopped once. They were still talking.

"Do you remember the zoo in Bronx Park?" asked Roundy. "Well, there was a bear in it that —"

"The fellow who figured out that tunnel under the Hudson River must have been a wonder," interrupted the practical Handy. "Remember how it tickled your ears when the train plunged under —"

"Remember Specs' getting mad because the chemical fire-engine went so fast he couldn't keep up?"

"Remember Nap's thinking that big hotel was the public library and trying —"

"Remember that wall-scaling stunt they showed us the day we visited those scouts on Long Island? There's something we want to learn."

"Remember how Judge tried to help a man in the rush-hour jam at Brooklyn Bridge, and nearly got arrested as a suspicious character?"

"Remember the time somebody threw mud at —"

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“Remember —”

Scout Master Stanton smiled from the club-house window. For months to come, the boys would live over and over that wonderful trip to New York. After a while, too, order would come from the chaos of memories, and they would begin to profit.

“Remember something else?” This was Bi’s deep voice, and there was a note of petulance in it. “Remember reminding me I was assistant patrol leader? Remember worrying me when Judge wasn’t around? Remember asking me fool questions? Remember egging me on to ask other people fool questions? Remember wanting me to get you all out of trouble every minute or so? Remember expecting me to know offhand where everything was, and how to get there. Remember getting sore when I went a block or two out of the way? Remember making things just about as disagreeable for me as you possibly could?”

“Aw, Bi!”

“Well, you did. And now I’m going to have my little say. Mr. Stanton, I don’t want to be assistant patrol leader any longer. I want to resign. I’d rather be Number 8 than Number 2.”

“Can’t be done,” chuckled Bunny. “I’m 8, you know. I’m last.”

“But not least,” denied Bi. He was smiling now.

“Why, if it hadn’t been for you, we’d never have gone to New York, because I wouldn’t have had sense enough to do my hill climbing the way I did. ‘Slow and sure,’ you told me beforehand; ‘safety first, Bi.’ And because I climbed that way, and the other fellow didn’t, we won the race.”

“He made me promise that I wouldn’t quit,” confessed Roundy, reddening a little. “I gave him my word I’d deliver the message. That’s why I kept on.”

“And he passed the advice along to me,” put in Handy.

“Bunny believes in fair play,” said Nap vaguely.

“One thing sure,” contributed Specs, “he knows how to steady a fellow when he’s rattled.”

“Remember that first aid race we had one day?” asked S. S. “Well, after he understood he’d been careless, he came around and apologized for something he’d said to me, and told me he’d bandage thoroughly next time. I—I thought of that when my splint broke in the relay.”

For the first time in a week, they fell silent. Bunny squirmed uneasily. All the fellows were grinning at him like Cheshire cats. He wished somebody would say something.

Scout Master Stanton was wise enough to turn the subject before it became too embarrassing. “Boys,”

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he announced, "Judge has something to tell you. And, Bi, we'll put that request of yours on the table till you hear him out."

Judge told them the news in a few words. He had graduated from the eighth grade the previous spring, and, as there was no high school in Lakeville, he was to be sent away to an academy to continue his education. That meant resigning from the Black Eagle Patrol, both as a scout and as the leader.

The fellows pressed close. They hated to have him go. They'd miss him. It wouldn't be like the old crowd without Judge. And who was to be patrol leader in his place?

Mr. Stanton looked at Bi. "Last year," he reminded them, "when this same lack of a high school cost us Buck Sawyer, each scout was moved up one number. In that case —"

"No, siree!" exploded Bi. "I don't want to be patrol leader. I don't even want to be assistant patrol leader, I tell you. Why — why not elect somebody?"

The scout master nodded. "I see no reason why we should not," he agreed, "provided the next in turn are willing. Are you, fellows?"

"Sure!" said Nap, who was Number 3.

"Sure!" said Handy, who was Number 4.

And "Sure!" "Sure!" "Sure!" echoed the others.

"Very well, then. The patrol leader will be elected. Suppose we figure a bit on the right scout for the honor. It seems to me he should be one who has helped most in the work we —"

"That's Bunny," declared Bi positively. He took a deep breath. "Bunny won the race and the ball game, built this house, trained young Anvers as a tenderfoot, saved Miser Meacham's apple-trees from frost, freed an innocent man at a trial, rescued a couple of people, and — and did a lot of other things I can't think of just now."

Bunny wanted to crawl under the table and hide. He couldn't remember ever having been so dumfounded in all his life. Here he was, the smallest, the newest scout, and Bi was proposing him for patrol leader.

He expected a storm of protests from the other members. But they seemed to think just as much of him as Bi did. And they didn't talk, either, like fellows who were saying so just to be polite.

Bi saw him hesitating. "If you'll be patrol leader," he promised, sighing deeply, "I'll keep on at the old job of assistant."

"I'd like to have you," said Bunny gratefully.

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In this way, without any fuss or formality whatever, Bunny Payton was elected leader of the Black Eagle Patrol.

THE END



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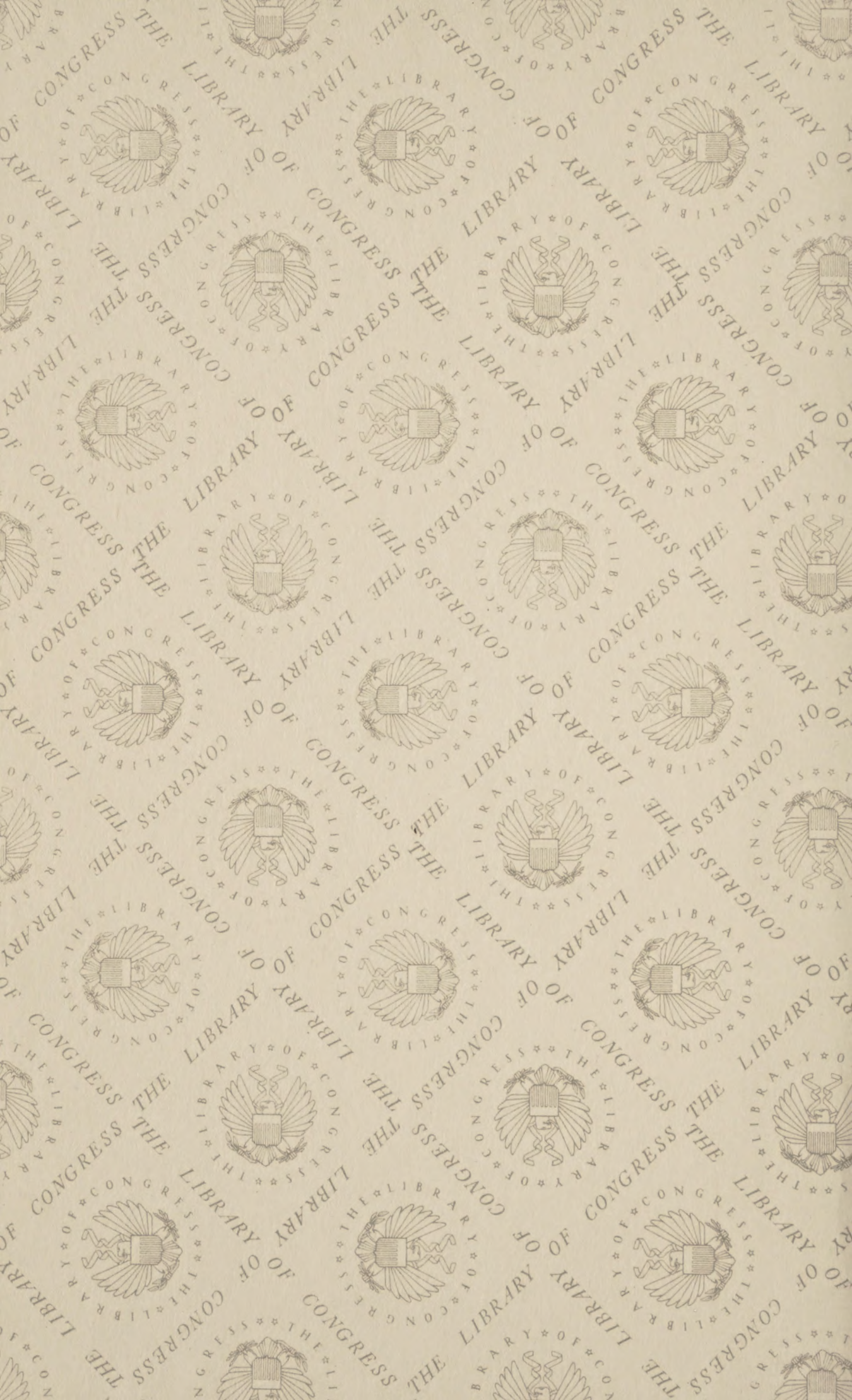
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